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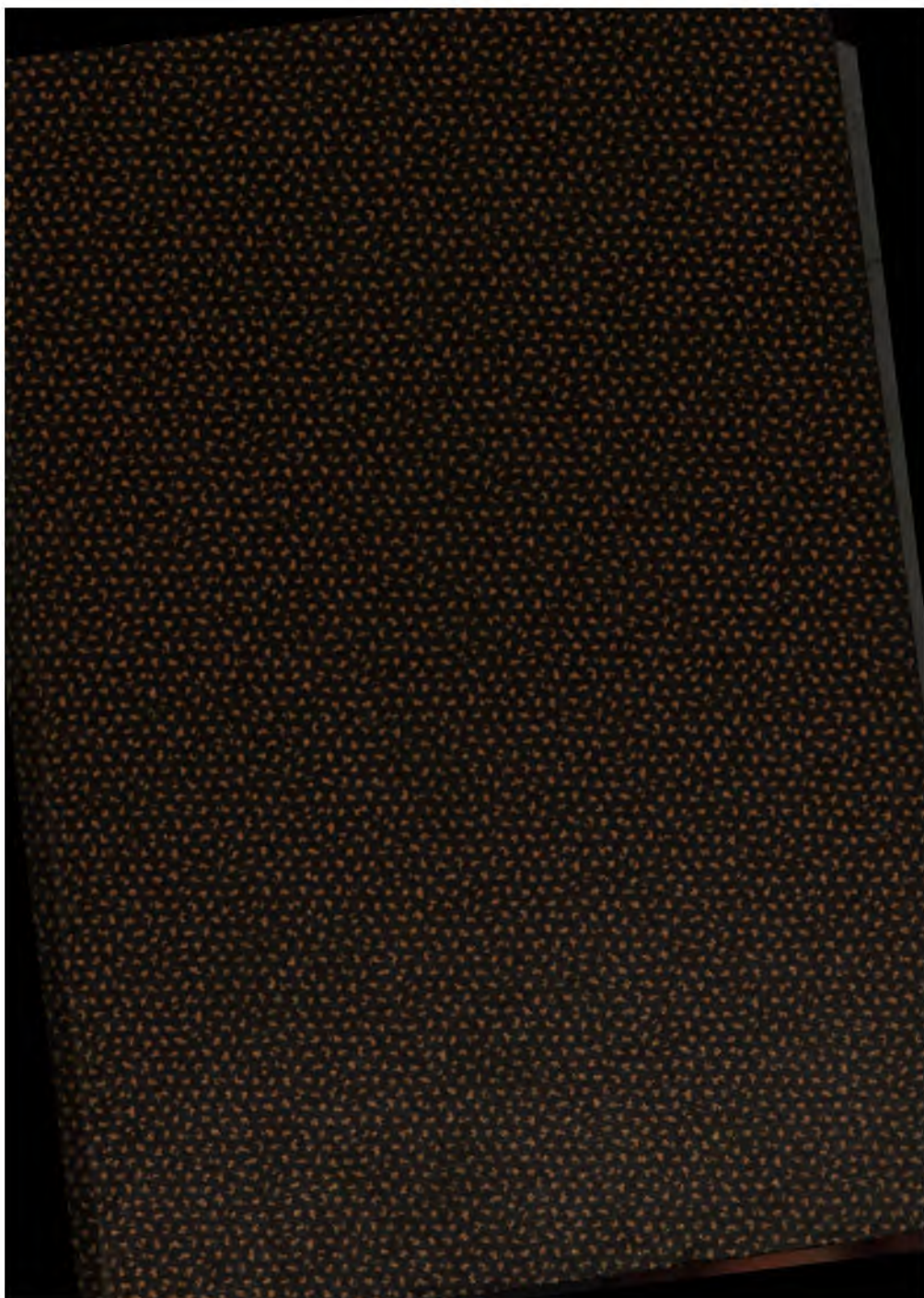
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A

FAIR COUNTRY MAID.

BY

E. FAIRFAX BYRRNE,
AUTHOR OF 'MILICENT.'

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LONDON:

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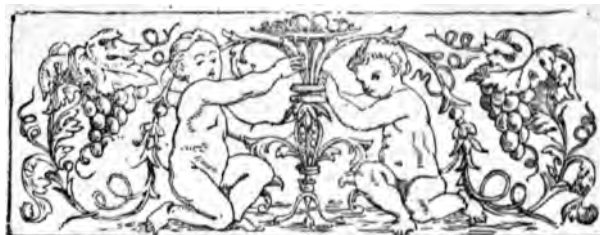
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BOOK I.



A FAIR COUNTRY MAID.

CHAPTER I.

THE SQUIRE'S RETURN.

'Bene. I have the toothache.'

Much Ado About Nothing.

DERRICK LEITH DEVONPORTE, of Hollyss Hall, Esq., was suffering from a fit of low spirits. The butler who poured out his wine perceived it, and dropped as much respectful reproach into the beverage as could be conveyed through gesture; the footman was conscious of it, and glanced at his master over his shoulder before disappearing with the last traces of dinner. Derrick was glad when they were all

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gone and he was left alone with the bull-dog ; he even resented the attentions of that valuable animal when it got up from the hearthrug and came thrusting its nose up on his knee, to offer him mute sympathy.

‘Down, Bel,’ said he, pushing this officious kindness away from him. The dog retired to his former position, placed his head between his paws, and blinked cautiously upon his master from afar.

Derrick’s eyes wandered round the room with that ineffable *ennui* which is apt to attack those who have everything that heart can wish, and are enjoying it alone ; then he lifted his glass to a level with his eyes, and watched the play of light through the purple colour. Some phantom of a quotation about the old Falernian wine—a mere verbal remnant from his university life—flickered dimly through his mind ; it was one of the scraps and ends of learning which he had lately achieved, and which he was already relieved to think he need not retain. For the sake of the days he was beginning to regret, he would



recall it now. But he stumbled—it was no use; the quotation was inappropriate, his memory failed him, or something had pierced the silver lute of Horace, and the words had no more music. He set down his glass with the wine untasted. Nor had he a mind, had such been the custom, to pour out a libation to his own Lares and Penates. He felt his home distasteful; he had no desire to clinch his return by offering worship to any homely deity; on the contrary, he wished with all his heart that he had not come.

Derrick was young, and the petulant droop of his lip was plainly observable under his moustache; there was a minute frown between his eyebrows, and his fine grey eyes were absent and dissatisfied. After he had placed his wine-glass upon the table, he pushed his chair back, tossed aside his napkin, and went towards one of the open glass-door windows. His dog was upon the alert in an instant, and following, stood unreprieved with his nose between his master's legs, his sympathetic eyes looking disconsolately out on the view,

and such tail as he had drooping exceedingly.

For some time the young Squire saw nothing of the view before him ; but presently the mists of thought cleared away, and he perceived that the slants of sunlight came down upon lawn and meadow in the park, carrying with them the shadows of the trees and imprinting them softly and clearly on the turf ; and that the flower-beds burnt in gold and fire and purple under the glow of the evening sun. He felt the stillness about him, a stillness not perfect, but broken by a gracious suggestion of melody. And as his eyes measured the acres of country around, and dwelt on the undulations of vigorous beauty, he realized with some exultation that this was his own place, and that by the pleasant arrangement of destiny and the general consent of mankind, there was no let or hindrance to his enjoying his own to the full in the way he preferred. He might indeed have blessed himself now as a son of good-fortune and gladness ; but at the moment when his self-


gratulation was, so to speak, about to flap wings and crow, the thought which had made him moody before returned upon him, bringing an angry colour to his cheek, and making him feel that the joy of his home-coming was poisoned with the sense of failure, even of absurdity. He had been leaning against the side of the long window; now he stepped across the threshold and moved away, driven by the impulse to walk off his vexation, if that were possible. Then he paused, shook back his head impatiently, and said *sotto voce* :

‘After all, I meant nothing! Being “gravelled for lack of matter,” I but took “occasion to kiss.”’

Then he lit a cigarette and resolved, as he placed it between his teeth, never to think of the matter again. The dog stood by reverently, feeling also in his lesser way that the world was ‘out of joint;’ but hardly had his master expended energy in this mighty resolution, than he re-plunged the thorn of that sharp thought within his bosom,

and lost himself in contemplating the wound it made.

There was nothing extraordinary or exceptional about Derrick either in appearance, character, or power. I cannot speak of his dominant brow or his mastering eye; on the contrary, his features harmonized pleasantly and comfortably, and left an impression of a handsome face with dark hair, dark eyebrows, pleasant grey eyes, and a clear fresh colour. He was tall, clean of limb and graceful in figure; he had the cultured and easy bearing of a gentleman of good birth—that, perhaps, was his principal characteristic on the surface. He could bowl a good ball at cricket, had rowed in the first boat in his college, but had not made one of the University eight, had done well in his final examination, but had by no means taken the highest honours; and, indeed, Homer and Sophocles, Virgil and Horace, the whole lot of them, were ready to slip out of his mind into oblivion, while the plays of Plautus were already dancing a hopeless dance with those of Terence and Menander



in his brain. His nature was full of foibles ; generous impulses and weaknesses shared it pretty equally ; but withal he had a tough residue of character which would do him good service on occasion. He was like hundreds of other young English gentlemen of whom nothing special can be said, but for whose multitudinous presence within her shores England is so much the better and greater. Hitherto his course had been along pleasant and smooth ways ; nothing had called forth the whole of his power, or troubled the shallow clearness of his ideas about men and things, or deepened the thought within him to passion and pain. His moral character might perhaps be called undeveloped ; nevertheless, he had certain distinct and a good many vague ideas of honour and duty ; his young conscience was clean, and his peccadilloes, his 'scapes of infirmity,' still brought the rueful blood into his face ; he had no thought of doing anything bad, neither had he of doing anything specially great ; he was good because he had been trained to be good,

and because, coming of a good race, his fine and faultless health loathed the notion of vice and evil; finally, he had been brought up in the advantages and disadvantages of his class, and retained its prejudices. And now this ready-made and prepared material was about to enter into life, to be shaped to ends which would have surprised none so much as Derrick himself; for he was not of a speculative turn, and never considered that there was any special meaning in his being alive, or any unsuspected springs of action within him.


As to the cause of his present grievance, it all lay in a kiss. A kiss is a small matter, yet carries a certain significance with it; it will not be lightly considered, and is apt to stickle for its rights. Derrick's embrace was, however, merely a proffered one; and it is hard that a kiss in embryo—an unfinished thing of the kind—a mere osculatory suggestion—should be the forerunner of sharp mental distress. The circumstance must be related in full—both the preamble and

event—because herein lies the beginning of the whole story.

Three hours ago Derrick had arrived at a station four or five miles distant from Hollyss, but the nearest there was to the village. From thence he had started in his dogcart to drive to the Hall. But just as his hand had gathered the reins, and the groom had loosed the horse's head, an acquaintance came out of the gate and turned from the station into the road. This man looked up at him with the shy hesitation of one who is uncertain whether he will be recognised or not. He was tall and rather clumsily made, with a plain but attractive face, with clever blue eyes, a remarkable brow, a clean-shaved cheek, and ample fair hair. He carried the unmistakable mark of rare originality. He had not escaped the nameless touch which a life at one of the two great universities leaves on a man, but a certain irrepressible and untamed force broke through that and everything else. He was a complete contrast to Derrick ; not harmonious and smooth, as one who has never felt the

friction of life and the world, but rugged and original—as one who has been inwardly driven to feel and to think and to experience. Any calm which this man might attain, would be drawn from the conclusions of his spiritual insight ; he might come to live above, but he would never be apart from the storm ; and he wore clearly on his face the ‘motto of his soul’—lines of powerful serenity in his lips, inscrutable depths in his eyes, and trouble on his brow. The fashion of his clothes was peculiar, being neither those of a layman nor of a clergyman ; they hinted at a Dissenting minister, and were moreover well worn. He was on foot, and a village lad with a barrow was preparing to follow with his modest portmanteau.

Derrick, that bright apparition of youth and wealth, was occupied in receiving the ministrations of the many who had flocked around him, carrying their services not where they were most needed, but where it was most agreeable to bestow them ; the large fair man saw that he was not noticed, and a sensitive colour crept to his cheek. He was



turning away, when—just at the moment when he least would have wished it, that is to say, before the red^o had quite passed off—the careless eyes of the other fell upon him. Derrick took in at a glance the unfashionable shabby figure; but in the midst of the exhilaration of his home-return he had no room for an ungenerous thought; he recognised in the man a college acquaintance who had once done him a good turn, and, without even a brief second of hesitation, cried out:

‘Saul Howell, as I’m alive!’

Saul Howell looked up with his face glorified by a smile.

‘Are you going my way?’ added Derrick. ‘Come up here, old fellow, and drive with me! Hi! William, go to the mare’s head; she dances as if she were bewitched. Who would have thought of meeting you here? Did you come by this train?’

Saul Howell *had* travelled by the same train as Derrick, only he came in a third-class carriage, crushed between a collier and an old market-woman; and the lift in the

well-hung dogcart, and the rush through the fresh air, were unspeakably refreshing to him after it.

‘How long is it since we met?’ asked Derrick, tickling the mare with the end of his whip. ‘Not since my first and your last term at Oxford, I believe. Some fellows pointed you out to me then, and said, “That’s Howell of St. John’s, you know;” and I did not for the life of me dare to breathe that I’d never heard of Howell of John’s before. You were the crack man of the year, and the dons were ready to kiss your feet. You must have been swotting like mad at your “final,” and yet you found time to be uncommonly kind to a humbugging freshman like I was. What a blockhead to funk “smalls”! But I was so horribly afraid lest so important a being as a Devonporte of Hollyss should come to grief first thing, you see. You put me right and helped me. Fairly laughed me through, I think, besides the coaching.’

‘Oh,’ said Howell quietly, ‘to go shares with one’s experience and acquirements is

“the cheapest way of beneficence” after all.’

‘I don’t know that. But what on earth brings you to this country-side?’

‘Have you not heard, then? These things do not, perhaps, come to your ears. Yet, in a manner, I belong to you.’

‘Belong to me! I’m uncomomnly proud and glad to hear it. How do you mean?’

‘You know Milltown?’

Now, besides the Park and lovely village of Hollyss, Derrick was the owner of a large district of country which was not lovely, but which was very lucrative. This land formed part of the suburb of Milltown, and thereon mills, cottages, and whole streets of houses had been built, which paid rent to the young Squire.

‘Yes, I know Milltown, of course,’ he said, in answer to Howell’s question.

‘There is an Independent Chapel there. It is built on land which your father presented as a gift for the purpose. A great many of your Milltown tenants, and some of the

Hollyss people, attend service there. And I have been appointed minister.'

'Oh!' said the other.

In accordance with his education and position, Derrick was a hater of Dissent, and Howell's information struck him with a certain ludicrous dismay; it was no pleasant discovery to find that accident compelled him to make his triumphal entry into the village with the Independent minister of Milltown in tow—hob-a-nob, as it were, with the principles he detested. Derrick had not quite left behind that age in which a youth is peculiarly sensitive to matters of the kind, and peculiarly anxious to strike his attitudes in accordance with the decorous opinion of the polite world. He dreaded anything like ridicule or remark; and yet he could not hope to shake off this incongruous companionship before arriving at Hollyss, for Milltown lay beyond that village. But Saul Howell was Saul Howell still, whatever profession he had been led to assume; also his obligations in the past remained the same:

he could not allow his dismay to mar his relations with his friend ; and so, although conversation flagged a little, they drove pleasantly into Hollyss together—young Devonporte the Squire, and Saul Howell the minister of Milltown.



CHAPTER II.

A LUCKLESS BEGINNING.

‘In thy lady’s gracious eyes
Look not thou too long ;
Else from them the glory flies,
And thou dost her wrong.’

MACDONALD.

HOLLYSS was a pretty well-cultivated village, full of woods and green pastures, corn-fields and sunny slopes. The bleaker country and hills lay in the background, and, enchanted by distance, lost much of their cold roughnesses. Beyond them, hidden by them, was the town in which Mr. Howell had found a field for his labours; and on the farther side of it, the country was wild and bleak in the extreme.

To-day, Hollyss had put on its brightest

aspect. The children of the Church school were out in the fields enjoying their school-treat, and the tenants had been fêted at the Squire's expense. Everyone was in holiday attire ; the old people had turned out to bask in the sun in the old-fashioned porches of their cottages, or to creep along the sunny side of the way, while the younger were playing games with the children in the field, or wandering about the woods and the road. As the dogcart bowled swiftly along, many and pleasant were the salutations which Derrick received : it began to appear rather like a triumphal progress ; and Saul Howell, who had ignorantly consented to share it, had his turn of feeling a little absurd, and would have willingly stepped down and continued his journey alone.

It was a small incident that changed the day for Derrick, and led on to mischief in the end. They had turned a corner of the road. A meadow lay to the left ; it was wide and undulating, and had its limits in the rambling discursive high-road on the one side, and the

woods on the other. Here the people were gathered at their games, and walking on the path towards the open field-gate was a young girl: a sweet picturesque figure she made, with an amber-coloured handkerchief tied about her auburn hair, and knitting as she went. Derrick checked his horse to a slower pace, the better to see her. She was simply dressed, and possessed great beauty of form, and a certain majesty of deportment. She added to her other attractions this one grace—a complete indifference to his approach. The dogcart overtook her as she reached the gate; she turned into the field without looking up, but Derrick caught a glimpse of her face—the profile merely, but this was lovely as a dream. The instinct which made him come to a standstill and turn his head to look after her, was the same that makes one pause in a gallery at the sight of a striking picture. But as he watched the youthful undulating grace of her form, and marked the peculiar stateliness of her carriage, a more living curiosity and eagerness crept into his heart, and he determined to

descend and follow. Mr. Howell, who, Derrick noticed, looked pale and weary, was by no means disinclined to free himself from a position which he had begun to feel distasteful; he also would accompany his friend, and the two entered the field together. Derrick had descried the Rector of the parish there. It was easy, therefore, to make him his ostensible object; and here he fortunately found himself able to dispose of Mr. Howell; for the Rector, a kindly man, was glad to recognise a scholar in spite of his dissent, and to hold out the hand of fellowship to a brother-worker. There was nothing now to hinder the Squire from roaming where he pleased.

The field was occupied by groups of men and girls at their games; there was cricket on the low level near the brook; leapfrog and football for the boys in the distance; quieter games, such as 'Drop-the-handkerchief' and the attractive 'Kiss-in-the-ring' in the front; and near the wood were a merry group playing at 'Cat-and-Mouse;' a rural game much affected in outdoor festivities in the North

Here was the point of interest for Derrick; the Amber Handkerchief stood by watching the players, her hands still occupied with her knitting, the worsted ball lying on the grass by her side. Upon a nearer approach the Squire perceived that she was far prettier than he had fancied at first, that indeed 'pretty' was by no means the word by which to describe her; she was pre-eminently the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. He had no idea of addressing her; all he wished was to pass near, so that he might get a good look at so exquisite a face; but the 'primrose path' is proverbially easy of entrance, and if the gate is not opened by a man's own hand, some one else will do it for him. As Derrick approached, the 'Mouse,' with the 'Cat' in pursuit, made a rush in his direction, and stepping back hastily to get out of the way, he caught his foot in the wool, dragged the pins from the girl's hands by a violent jerk, and caused a terrible disintegration of the half-made stocking. She uttered a cry of dismay; and Derrick, penitent and vexed, went down on his

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knees and gathered up the ball, and the pins, and the unravelled wool in a moment.

‘I am so sorry ! Pray come and sit down in the shade and see if we cannot put it right !’

The girl had not noticed who was the author of the mischief ; she raised her eyes now with the dilation of surprise in them, and fixed them full upon Derrick’s face. Instantly he experienced the strangest sensation ; their beauty—their brilliancy, depth, and lustre—struck him with the shock of surprise ; it was almost as though two great, soft pansies had opened out suddenly before him. Were they purple, or a wonderful brown ? His heart gave a leap, and the colour rushed to his cheek ; then he saw his blush reflected in her face, and for the moment neither could look away from the other.

The girl was the first to move ; there was the slightest possible rearing of the graceful neck—merely enough to suggest a modest withdrawal, and nothing that was conscious or foolish—and she turned mechanically towards

the wood ; Derrick, carrying the chaotic heap of pins and worsted, followed closely. Neither of them spoke ; she had made no response in words, and he scarcely knew whether she had gathered his meaning. After taking a few steps she turned, and held out her hands for the wool and pins.

‘Pray come a little farther, out of the heat,’ said Derrick hastily. ‘I am so sorry for what I have done.’

Beyond the narrow belt of wood was a bank which had been cleared of trees ; here a little spring emptied itself into a pretty stone trough, and here they sat down. The grass was brown with heat, and had been cropped short by cattle ; but the trickling water made one delicious spot of verdure, and the trough was decked with moss and fern. A tree gave them shade, but the sun came through the branches and played over her head. The girl tossed aside her amber handkerchief, and Derrick resigned the knitting into her hands ; then he sat looking at the tresses of her lovely hair, at the peach-bloom of her cheek and the

tender curves of throat and chin. It did not seem to signify whether she spoke or not ; he would have been glad if the dark lashes and pearly lids had lifted to give him another glance at the eyes underneath, but on the whole his sense of pleasure was complete.

She was trying to pick up her stitches now, and he handed the needles as she needed them ; when this was done he endeavoured to disentangle and roll up the worsted he had spoiled. It was all very pastoral and pretty and simple, and extraordinarily refreshing after Oxford and ‘greats.’

‘A deal has come undone,’ she said at last with a sigh—almost as though she were talking to herself.

‘Does it matter very much ?’ said Derrick earnestly, and watching her fingers.

‘It *does* matter,’ she replied gravely. ‘This is the last o’ the pair, and I meant to have carried them to the shop to-morrow.’

‘I will buy them from you. You must sell them to me, because I spoilt them.’

‘Nay, nay, sir ! That ’ud niver do. These are not the make for such as yo.’

‘Ah, but let me ! I wish I knew how I could mend the mischief.’

‘There’s a deal a squire can do ; but he can’t run up unravelled hose.’

Derrick reflected a little : did she, perhaps, possess a character that would match with her looks ?

‘Do sell them to me. It was all my fault.’

‘Not all of it, sir. Some was my own, for the wool should na have lain on the grass. I’ve not blamed yo.’

‘Thank you,’ said Derrick. ‘Am I rolling this right ?’

He held out the ball as he spoke ; she glanced at it critically.

‘Ay, sir. It is na bad for a mon—*gentleman*, I should say.’

She blushed prettily as she corrected herself.

‘You know my name, I dare say,’ said Derrick, tossing the ball into her lap. ‘Perhaps you will tell me what yours is.’

‘Marjorie Morrison, sir. I’m farmer Morrison’s daughter, of the Cockshuthey Farm.’

‘Your father is my tenant. So you in a manner belong to me, Marjorie.’

‘Ay, sir. Most folks here are your tenants, I reckon.’

The girl’s replies were provokingly indifferent ; and Derrick, fretted by her coolness, determined to put out more of his power. Hitherto he had believed himself to be entirely indifferent to the other sex ; he was sick of flirtations and balls and society women. But then, he had never met anyone like Marjorie before. Now what should he do to interest her ? He would tell her stories of life and experience such as could never have come to her ears before. And he had his reward.

Marjorie presently dropped her knitting, and lifted her eyes and sat gazing before her with lips just parted in wonder and interest ; Derrick thought it was like watching the dawn of a soul in a beautiful picture. By-and-bye he perceived that her attention was not wholly

absorbed in the tales ; her eyes, when once or twice—perhaps in search of ideas—his had wandered from her face to the landscape, immediately turned towards him with long stolen looks ; it made him tremble to feel that the velvety irises were on him, but it gave him an exquisite pleasure. Then he rose and flung himself full-length on the grass close by her, and abandoned himself to the delight of looking into her face unreservedly, intercepting and holding such glances as he could obtain. It was paradise in its way, but it was of short duration ; when an hour had passed, he unwillingly acknowledged that it was time to be moving ; then he rose lazily, sighed and shook himself, and offered his hand to help her to her feet. Gentle attentions such as these were new to Marjorie ; it was more natural to her to bestow than receive help ; mechanically she placed her fingers in his and rose, looking wistfully at him.

Derrick thought he saw some of the glamour which had come over himself reflected in her eyes, and the wonder of his tales had not yet

died out of them. His was the advantage now, and he felt it; the changes of her face were sweet to behold; his heart beat quicker, and a longing for yet sweeter experiences seized him, and hurried him into actions and words that had far better have been left undone and unspoken. How should he exercise his power? He retained her hand and drew nearer to her, and with his kind eyes resting on hers, inquired gently if he had atoned for the mischief he had done.

The girl, with her colour coming and going, opened her lips twice before she could find her answer.

‘Yo did no harm. It matters nothing.’

There was hurry in the voice, and confusion in the droop of the lids. It was all very new and wonderful to Derrick; he was drawn on in spite of himself, and sought out what he should say next with the instinct of discovery.

‘I shall not be able to believe it, unless you say more than that. I shall think you are vexed.’

‘Vexed! Nay, nay, sir.’

‘ You were vexed at first, Marjorie—a little. Tell me if we are really friends now.’

‘ Yes, indeed, sir—if you care to be friends with a village girl.’

‘ I *do* care, Marjorie. But pray do not say “sir” when you speak to me.’

‘ Master Derrick, then.’

‘ Ah, that is much better. Marjorie !—when people have made friends, then they kiss.’

Derrick was surprised at the gentleness of his own voice ; it was strange to him. Marjorie gave no inharmonious or dissentient start ; she continued to look up frankly ; but a little perplexity troubled her eyes. He smiled down upon her with the graceful assurance and superiority which his position and bearing gave him. He had never asked a woman for a kiss before ; he intended that this should be as lighthearted and insignificant an act as a child’s bite at a red round peach. With a pretty and kittenish young face before him, this reasoning perhaps might have answered ; but Marjorie was not of this type, nor, had she been, would he have cared for

her favour; he was fully aware that the woman beside him was of statuesque form, with a proudly posed throat and a grave expression, and in a presence like this his self-persuasion was the mere subterfuge of incipient passion.

‘I may take one kiss, may I not?’

He leaned forward with his lips near her cheek, and waited for the sweet consenting movement of her face towards his. There was a pause.

It was broken in the manner which he least expected, for a rough grasp wrenched his hand from the girl’s, and a stern voice cried in his ears:

‘Nay, nay, maister! Yon’s not the lass for yo to kiss!’

Here was a rude dispersion of a culminating fact! Derrick’s half-formed kiss was blown to the winds of heaven. Had the intruder been an old man of venerable aspect, he might perhaps have recognised the voice of wisdom in these words, laughed, excused himself, and retired. Unfortunately they were

spoken by a young man—a mere farmer's lad in dress and appearance. He was a splendid young fellow, however, in size and strength, and his bronzed face blazed with ill-controlled wrath. He had drawn Marjorie apart, and was grasping her wrist fiercely; she was standing—somewhat tamely, Derrick thought—pale and silent by his side.

Derrick confronted the new-comer. He was really too innocent in act and intention to feel abashed; he considered the implication on his conduct unjust, and the intrusion unwarranted; he thought it might end in a fight, but he had no intention of yielding without inquiring into the stranger's right to interfere.

'Who is this man?' he asked hotly of Marjorie.

She made no response.

'Have I done you an injury, or meant one, that he should come with his absurd interference?'

'No. No injury, sir,' said Marjorie, with tremulous quiet.

‘Is he anyone belonging to you? Has he a right to direct you?’

There was a movement throughout Marjorie’s whole frame; Derrick was too excited to conjecture as to its meaning; she had flung back her head with a haughty action, and opened her lips as if to reply, but no answer was forthcoming.

‘Sir,’ interposed the young man, speaking hastily and gently, ‘I am, unfortunately, only her friend.’

‘And I am your friend too, Marjorie,’ said Derrick, taking courage and plunging into new indiscretions. ‘If you send me away from you, I will go, of course; but not without you send me. It is true that I asked for a kiss—such a kiss as friend might give to friend on occasion—as a sign of your forgiveness for spoiling your work. I am sure that I cannot have offended you in this. Yet, forgive me if I have. I am now going to take you back to the field. Come with me, Marjorie.’

He approached her again with as much deference in his bearing as if he had been

suing for a favour from a lady of rank. It began to appear strangely important to him that she should grant his request—a matter almost touching his honour.

The young farmer, as Derrick came near, loosed his hold of her wrist and withdrew a step or two; now he stood quietly contemplating the scene. Marjorie stood between the two men, her fingers lightly linked, her face downcast, and her aspect proud and reserved. Derrick, as he waited, forgot their relative positions in life.

‘Marjorie, will you come?’

She raised her head suddenly, and looked, not at, but beyond him.

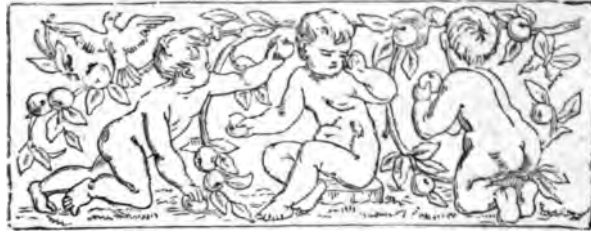
‘No, sir,’ she said firmly. ‘Yo’ve done me no injury, of course; and I am ‘na offended. Yo’re kind—an’ yo’re gentle. Bonnie, too!—maybe as bonnie a mon as iver I seed! But I’ll not go with yo back to the field.’

Derrick felt terribly hurt; he was unmistakably dismissed. He looked reproachfully into her face, but it was set, and the eyes ignored him.

‘Very well, Marjorie. Good-bye, then.’

The pain in his heart, as he turned away, was compounded of wounded pride, the intolerable conviction that he had been acting absurdly, and certain other vague sensations which a wiser than he could have explained, perhaps, with philosophical accuracy. He did not observe that Marjorie had dismissed the farmer lad also; he had no wish to look back. Also, as he faced the wood, he encountered the forms of the Rector and Mr. Howell—persons whom, at that moment, he was least desirous of meeting. How much had they seen? On the part of the Rector, nothing at all. But with Saul Howell it was different. His were the eyes which Derrick first encountered, and they darted at him a momentary look of such pale apprehension—almost terror—that it waked an answering dismay in his heart.

Then he had gone home to his lonely dinner and reflections. It must be confessed that he had made a luckless beginning.



CHAPTER III.

SCHEMES OF REFORM.

REMOVE a circumstance to the distance of two or three days, and it will show itself in a new aspect; and it was no pleasant one which Derrick's escapade put on to his conscience after such a space of time. The slumbers of a few nights cleared his brain from excitement and comfortably replaced him in a prosaic world; then he saw his conduct in a light most unpleasing to himself; he saw also the disadvantage in which it had placed him.

‘Marjorie and her champion, and the rest of the people, if they hear of it, will have a right to despise me,’ he said to himself frankly, on the third morning after the

festival. 'I've behaved like any cad—like a cheap-trip snob on a holiday—like—like—Jones of St. Mary Hall.'

Now Jones of St. Mary Hall was a disreputable youth whom Derrick disdained; his nature was a bad soil, out of which vices spontaneously sprang: whatsoever was low and unlovely in conduct, to that he addicted himself from deliberate choice; he kissed barmaids (the matter which Derrick had specially in mind), or attempted to do so, out of a mere superfluity of naughtiness, out of the vacancy instead of the fulness of feeling. And when Derrick said that he was like him, he expressed an intolerant self-scorn to which the young and the ardent are addicted. Then, having lashed himself with words, he determined to put the affair aside, and at once to undertake the duties that had fallen to him; this he believed was the best way of clearing off the impression his conduct might have given.


But there was in reality no parallel between Derrick and Jones of St. Mary Hall. I do

not suppose the latter had ever been inspired by a good honest passion in his life ; whereas Derrick's well-ordered mind had been driven off the lines by the sentiment excited within him at the sight of the most beautiful face he had ever beheld. Nor did this impression lessen ; as the hours went by and he compared the unworthy puerility of his actions with Marjorie's serene beauty and bearing, the unloveliness of the one and the loveliness of the other increased in his eyes. He longed for another meeting with her ; but he saw in it only an opportunity of showing his repentance by treating her with the most delicate respect of which he was capable. As to the young farmer, he rather admired while he hated him ; it was undeniable that he had had the best in the matter, and Derrick had none of that vanity which cannot acknowledge superiority in another. He hated him, nevertheless ; but he scarcely knew why.

Meanwhile there was plenty for Derrick to do. During a long minority—although his property had steadily increased owing to the

value of the Milltown district—a laxity in the ideas of his Hollyss tenants as to their duties to the Squire, and an enlargement in their notions as to the Squire's duties to them, had been growing. Derrick was open and generous as the day; but then he liked to bestow his gifts himself, and objected to have them taken from him; encroachment and pilfering roused him not a little, and stirred up the energies within him. When he found that the gooseberries and cabbages were carried off from his gardens by stray and errant persons who casually wandered therein, and that the more private of his grounds were the daily resort of a booty-seeking people; when he found that certain of his tenants paid rent when convenience prompted, and not otherwise; that his servants plundered while they loved him; and that his quarrymen chipped up the stones in his quarries for purposes foreign to his interest, then he determined on measures of reform. So pleasant, so gay was the young Squire's aspect, so courteous, so gentle was his

manner, that people were a little astonished when the revolution began; with the inconsequence of those who have been robbing for long, they had begun to think that accumulated acts of petty larceny in the past constituted a right to continue them in the present, and they were surprised that so urbane and generous a gentleman should care to inquire into the subject. But Derrick did care to inquire. He had worked hard at college on subjects for which he was little disposed, because he thought it his duty to do so; and now, when he came to the practical life for which he was really fitted, it was unlikely that he would show laxity therein. He was no idle lover of pleasure; he meant to work; he meant that the people under him should be happy, but also that in all things they should meet his ideas of justice; herein he had intentions that were neither unfair nor ungenerous; yet his notions were chiefly built upon the prejudices of his class. There were two things on which he was specially determined to insist: he would put an end to



the petty robberies at the quarries, and he would make clear to the people that their opinion as to the right of way through his park did not coincide with his own. The reforms began speedily; fences and hedges were repaired, inquiries were instituted, servants were dismissed, and the rent-roll was thoroughly examined. People wondered.

But at present it was early days in the matter; only an incipient bud of reform had blossomed; his schemes were cherished in his own brain chiefly, though he dropped a hint of his intentions and, rather to the alarm of his farmers, began actively to visit the farms.

In the midst of this rising energy, Marjorie remained unforgotten. The grave and beautiful face which had been near him for an hour, lay in the foreground of his thoughts. Instinctively he had at present avoided a call at the Cockshuthey Farm, though he had encountered Farmer Morrison in the fields; but the hope of meeting her again lent excitement to his rides, and threw something of glamour over

his pursuits. Ten days, however, passed without bringing him a glimpse of her, and he began to despair of adding the interest of such meetings to his life. Then he began to feel, after the activities of the day were over, that the evenings were lonely and flat, and to wish that some of his old companions lived near.

‘You’ll be wanting your aunt Clementina back again, Master Derrick,’ said a privileged old servant one day—a housekeeper who aired his linen and advised him.

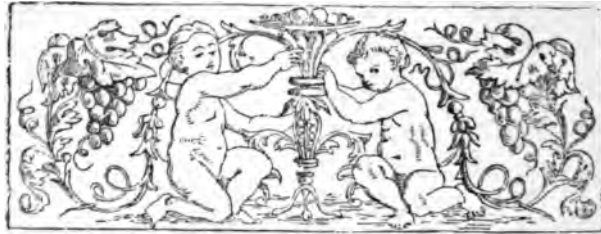
Derrick smiled and put her off with a joke ; but when she was gone, he exclaimed to himself :

‘My aunt Clementina ! Good heavens !’

Then, terrified at this threat of a feminine invasion on his liberty, and fearful lest the women were conspiring together to befriend him, he sat down to his writing-table and drew a sheet of paper towards him. There was Howell at hand. Should he invite him ? Yes, it would be an excellent thing to ask him to dinner, and get his advice respecting

the people, with whose character and habits his duties would have rendered him familiar. Also, it would be interesting to discover—if possible—by what strokes of reasoning and fate the brilliant First Classman of Oxford had resolved himself into the minister of Milltown.

He wrote his letter ; and just as he finished it some one entered the room with the information that Zachary Pearse, the quarryman, had called, and said it was by appointment.



CHAPTER IV.

DIFFERENCE OF OPINION.

‘He hath a tear for pity, and a hand
Open as day for melting charity ;
Yet notwithstanding, being incensed, he’s flint.’

Henry IV., Part II.

ZACHARY PEARSE had been told to wait in the hall. It was a pleasant place to be in. Old wood carving and armour, dark colours and harmonious effects, pictures, softly stained glass and interesting windows, relics and heirlooms hanging on the panels—such was the room.

Over the fireplace was a wooden penthouse roof, with two seats underneath, and the arms and motto of Devonporte carved upon it ; above, reaching to the ceiling, was a fine

picture ; the doors of the entrance to the hall, both inner and outer ones, were open, and the landscape, which in the morning had been gay with sunshine, slept now in the sunless twilight ; but the rays of light were focussed strongly through the open doors on the fireplace opposite, and the picture was plainly visible. With his elbows leaning on the long table in the middle of the hall, and his eyes fixed on the picture in absorbed contemplation of it, was Zachary Pearse, the quarryman. Derrick entered by a side door ; his tread was not heard on the Indian carpet, and the man did not look up ; the Squire remained, therefore, for a moment without discovering himself, in order to observe him.

Zachary wore a clean blue blouse and a pair of coarse but clean trousers. He was young—a lad of about twenty—three years Derrick's junior ; he had a dark, beautiful, refined face, with melancholy large eyes ; his shoulders were broad and his arms muscular and powerful, yet he gave the impression of

being unusually delicate. Derrick wondered what had cast the indefinite shadow on his face; but, as the lad turned from the table and took two or three steps towards the door, he perceived that one of his legs was misshapen, and that he limped as he walked. His lameness was not sufficient to incapacitate him, but it would certainly debar him from outdoor pastimes and games of strength, such as men delight in, and it disfigured him sadly.

‘Good-evening, Pearse,’ said Derrick, coming forward.

Pearse started and turned round. The Squire seated himself on a queer wooden chair whose back was fantastically carved into the semblance of a dragon—the head with protruded tongue and fierce eyes being stretched out above him—and rested his two hands lightly on the extended limbs and brass-tipped talons which formed the arms. He knew well that a case for reform stood before him in Zachary’s shape, and he wore a grave and determined air which became him.

‘Evenin’, Maister Derrick, sir. Glad to see yo home.’

Zachary touched his forehead with his hand as he spoke, and then remained silent, looking shy and awkward enough. Nevertheless, there was a freedom and directness about the gaze of his great dark eyes that discomfited Derrick not a little.

‘Thank you. You were admiring my picture, I think,’ said Derrick, for the purpose of gaining time.

‘Aye, sir: it’s grand. But I like one that yo have upstairs i’ a long room—picture-gallery yo call it—better. And there’s a figure—statue yo say—at the top o’ the stairs caps all.’

Derrick heard these few criticisms on his art treasures with unfeigned wonder.

‘You appear tolerably familiar with my house,’ said he, concealing his amaze.

‘Aye, sir; I am. Bless yo! there’s scarcely a week that I am not here.’

‘Indeed! And what may be your errand?’

‘Oh, just to look round.’

‘By whose permission?’

Derrick had got his head back on the chair now, and was surveying Zachary coolly from under his eyelids. He had a dim prevision of new revelations respecting freedom of action in his tenants; yet he scarcely knew whether to laugh or be angry at the frank presumption of the lad before him.

‘I canna rightly say by whose permission. Mrs. Finch knows I come. And I do hope there’s no offence.’

The dark eyes darted a soft, apologetic look towards Derrick. The lad was evidently more surprised at this questioning than anxious about the result. As to the Squire, he was dumbfounded. Mrs. Finch was that privileged old lady who considered him still in his minority, and who looked after his linen and health. Derrick perceived that the evils he combated were more deeply rooted than he had imagined—that they had undermined the stronghold of his own home, and that in his case the proverb that ‘an Englishman’s house is his castle’ did not apply. Revolving this

unpleasant conviction in his mind, he sat silently staring at the ground, forgetful of the presence before him.

‘Yo sent for me about the quarry, sir,’ said Zachary, with gentle reminder.

‘Yes, I did, Pearse,’ replied Derrick, looking up with his air of decision. ‘You rent the Cat-ladder Quarry, it appears.’

‘It’s my father as rents it, sir—not I.’

‘All I mean is that your family has rented and worked it for some years.’

‘Certainly, sir.’

The two were now thoroughly attentive the one to the other; and Derrick noticed the dilation of anxiety in the eyes fixed upon him. Then his glance wandered to the poor misshapen limb, and it seemed easier for the moment to express kindly feeling than to plunge into the sternness of inquiry.

‘Sit down, Pearse,’ said he, pointing to a bench near him.

‘I’ll stand, thank yo, maister.’

‘Is the quarry doing well?’

‘No, not well,’ said Zachary, with suppressed energy.

‘The stone is excellent, I hear.’

‘Maybe. As to that—yes, yes—but it might be better.’

Zachary’s eyes turned from the Squire: they had a curiously yearning look in them, and he sighed. Derrick had the impression that his mind had wandered altogether from the point for the moment.

‘Millstone grit works easily, and is much in demand for building here.’


‘Aye, sir,’ replied Pearse, again attentive. ‘It’s grand stuff for that—cuts and chips as neat as a slice o’ cheese. See yo! wi’ my chisel I have knocked off a bit to a turn, and left an edge as ull dovetail well-nigh wi’ its fellow. Aye, it’s grand stuff for building.’

‘Why, then, did you say at first that it might be better?’

Zachary looked blank.

‘You are a good workman, I gather?’

Again the eyes wandered wistfully, and the response when it came was yielded unwillingly.



‘ Middlin’, sir ; only middlin’.’

Derrick came to his point.

‘ I hear that when you choose to work you are an excellent mason. How is it that the quarry does badly ?’

Zachary turned sharply away, and his mouth closed tightly.

‘ Pearse,’ said Derrick, as quietly and resolutely as he could, ‘ I have been looking into things a little. I find that the rent of the Cat-ladder Quarry has not been paid for three years. It is the worst case I have.’

Here was the ground clearly laid down upon which argument was likely to ensue ; Derrick was sure that he had right and justice on his side, yet he had scarcely ever felt less at his ease in his life. Zachary took two or three limping steps towards the table, and stood supporting himself thereon ; his face was turned from Derrick towards the open door : he said nothing in answer, but Derrick could see the trouble which his words had caused.

‘Have you any explanation to give me?’ said he firmly.

‘Give us time, maister; give us time,’ said the lad, in a low voice.

‘Certainly you shall have time. But you have let the rent already lapse for three years.’

‘Is it three years?’ said the lad, with a dazed look.

‘Do you mean to tell me that you did not *know* whether your rent was paid or not?’ asked Derrick sharply, his own peremptory sense of duty outraged by this scandalous neglect.

‘Not rightly for how long—no, I’d not thought for how long.’

‘But you knew that for some time it had gone unpaid?’

The lad nodded.

‘Now, Pearse,’ continued Derrick, ‘we must come to some understanding about this. I can let that quarry on much more advantageous terms than those on which it has been let to you. It is small, but it has proved

to be richly stocked with the best stone on my estate. Willatt, who rented the cottage and the Patch Meadow above, has lately died ; and a man has come forward who is anxious to take both Patch and Cat-ladder, with the intention of quarrying throughout. But I give you my word, that if you will pay me the rent I will not disturb you.'

'The rent, Maister Derrick ? Three years' rent i' a lump ? Ask the steward if iver such a thing was asked before !' said the lad, in the same dazed way.

'My steward,' said Derrick sharply, 'is an idle, shuffling idiot ! He is going ; I am my own steward.'

'Well,' said Zachary, with unexpected acquiescence, 'yo're right. I make no doubt of it. But the rent, sir ?'

'I have told you my terms, Pearse. Is it your fault or your father's that it has remained unpaid ?'

'My fault, sir,' said Zachary earnestly ; 'all my fault. He thinks that everything is paid. He is very ailing, sir. I make the

best of it to him always. He has saved a bit, and is able to pay a mon t' work i' his place, and that's all.'

The lad's words were anything but in his favour; they pointed to an indifference to duty, and a confusion in his ideas of honesty most unpraiseworthy. Yet Derrick, in spite of himself, was not ill-impressed by him; there was a frankness in his manner, an earnestness in his face, which were remarkable. He certainly appeared to have no intention of offering an explanation; on the other hand, he had broken out into no false excuses. He stood by the table, not with the aspect of one convicted in evil, but of one struggling silently with a great and unforeseen calamity. Derrick, greatly touched by his look, was tempted to take sides against himself, and would certainly have done so had money alone been in question; but it was a principle which he was trying to enforce.

'I've no wish to be hard on you, Pearse. You know it, I am sure. Only work well, and pay me that rent by instalments, and

you shall keep the quarry. Show me that you are in earnest about it.'

As Derrick said these words, he made a resolve that, when he had proved the lad, the arrears of rent should be forgiven and returned. Meanwhile his pity—to be really of use—must be held in abeyance. Zachary, as he listened, turned his eyes upon him with a dumb look of pain; for a moment Derrick believed that an explanation would follow, but nothing was forthcoming.

'Thank yo,' he said quietly; and then, taking up his cap, without further remark he turned towards the door.

The Squire watched him as he limped away; he hesitated as to whether he should leave the other point untouched; the whole business was getting eminently distasteful, but it was better to despatch an unpleasant matter quickly.

'Stay,' he said, as Zachary reached the door, 'there is something else about which we had better come to an understanding at once. You tell me that you are frequently

in the habit of visiting my house uninvited.'

'Yo're going to say to me,' said Zachary, coming back precipitately, with his sensitive face flushing and his eyes filled with unconcealed anxiety, 'that I am not to come here again?'


'Not exactly that,' said Derrick kindly; 'but you must be aware, Pearse, that it would be, to say the least of it, highly inconvenient to me if any of my tenants who wished it were to come at will to roam over my house. There are, no doubt, some beautiful and interesting things in the Hall which you and others may care to look at on occasion. I shall have—I had not thought of it before—but I shall now arrange to have "open days," in order that you and others may come, if you choose, and look at my things, under the guidance of my housekeeper.'

The matter was so ridiculously plain—the grace he was willing to give so unquestionably sufficient in Derrick's eyes! He was

unprepared to find that his view struck another differently. But that it did so, began to be evident from the working of Zachary's face.

'Yo think,' cried he, speaking with some passion, 'that I can tolerate the interference o' yor housekeeper when I come here! I want guidance, true enough. But not o' Mrs. Finch's sort. Look yo, young maister; can yo count up the years as yo've been away from the place, and left these works of art wasting on yor walls? Money's a powerful thing, I must say. It can take the fruit o' a man's genius and lock it up for years in a tenantless mansion where it may decay and drop off th' walls for aught the owner knows to the contrary. And it's a useful thing, *maybe*, when it does that. But one mon i' yor village has had the wit to find out yor treasures; he's robbed yo of 'em, I reckon, for they've passed through his eyes into his mind, and are assuredly more truly hisn than iver they were yourn. Look at the cold, thankless eye yo turn on 'em! They're

mine, maister, not yourn. They've been t' best part o' my education—though, thanks to some, that has na been small. And now, home you come, and out yo turn me. “Away with your low-born eyes,” yo sayn; “they shanna look on my pictures!” *My* works o' art—*my* art-treasures! Ay! it's a grand thing t' say that, though yo may na be much at discriminating atwixt them! Well, well! drive me off if yo've th' heart, but dunna insult Zachary Pearse wi' sending him round yor house tied to a servant's appern-string. Lord! I'd ha' thought there were room for both yo and me i' th' place! But I understand yo. It's t' working-man as sticks i' yor throat. And dunna suppose that I blame yo. Yor welcome to yor likes and dislikes. Look yo, howiver, young maister!' he added, with a gentler tone, ‘there's something about yo as draws me i' spite o' mysen. I reckon there's something fine and generous i' yor race, and it leads me to trusten yo a bit. John Morrison, he says—and I'll be bound that it's true—that one o' your family—a beauti-



ful woman she were—saw the grace i' a lad o' the fields, and come out o' her dignity and station, and loved him and wed him, and dwelt by his side till the day o' her death. Well, that were a poem, I reckon. A kind o' rare wholesome bit o' natur as ull keep yor race sweet for a while, and save yo from stagnation and decay—leastways if th' same grand spirit is wi' yo as were wi' her. And, looking on yor face, Maister Derrick, I gather that it is. See yo! we've longed for yo home. We're folks as can afford to love us Squire. Yo've begun wi' reforms. Well, i' th' matter o' rent I'm willing t' say that it's right, but *not*,' he said with emphasis, 'i' the matter o' the pictur's. Dunna turn me out, Maister Derrick!'

Zachary brought his astonishing speech to a close. The sentences had been spoken in the quick incisive way which belongs to emotion, and his voice had modulated throughout between the tones of indignation, argument, and entreaty; they had left off in a note of the last. And now he stood waiting for

Derrick's reply. The latter had listened with unqualified amaze ; he had alternated between anger and amusement as the downpour had descended upon him. Now it was evident that an answer was expected. He reflected a moment. Many a man would have laughed at the quarryman's insolent assumptions ; some would have given way to anger and storms. Derrick would do neither. He had all the narrow clearness of mind and purpose which is the ordinary concomitant of strong and ignorant youth ; but he had also a lively, a pictorial power of sympathy. It was plain to him that Pearse was animated by some burning idea which, however mistaken, formed the undoubted truth in his eyes ; and whatever ludicrous conclusions it had led him into, he would for the present abstain from crushing him either by severity or argument. Frankly he did not understand what he meant, and he would give him the benefit of the doubt.

‘Pearse,’ said he gently and gravely, ‘you cannot expect me to see things as you do in

a moment. Attend to my orders for the present; go now, and be sure that I shall not forget you. I will make inquiries about you.'

Zachary sighed, touched his forehead mechanically, and left the Squire alone.



CHAPTER V.

MISCHIEF.

AS soon as the quarryman had gone, Derrick's mind fastened upon the last part of his speech, the allusions of which he was at a loss to comprehend. Whoever 'John Morrison' might be—and perhaps he would prove a near relative of Marjorie—he knew considerably more of the Devonporte family history than Derrick himself. There was, however, a tradition, in some respects tallying with the information he had just received, with which the young Squire was as familiar as all the Devonportes had been before him.

The story ran, that many generations ago the race was represented by two beautiful


sisters, the elder of whom had formed a marriage against the wishes of her father, and had been disinherited ; and the younger had done her duty by becoming the wife of a man of good family, who had taken her name. This lady and her husband were Derrick's ancestors ; but of the elder sister and her fate there was no record in the family history—whom she had married was unknown to him, and had been, as far as he knew, unknown to his parents and grand-parents. Yet the memory of the luckless beauty had not quite disappeared : it was kept up by the very means taken to erase it.

There was in Hollyss Hall a certain room which, as far as was known, had been kept locked and barred for several generations. The tradition ran that a curse had been pronounced against any who should venture to enter ; it was the closet in which the family skeleton was stowed away, and to open the door was to set the gaunt enemy at liberty, and send him stalking through the family history again. The curse had been pronounced

a hundred and fifty years ago, or thereabouts, by an angry father, who had turned the key in the lock with curses and oaths one morning. Connected, it was supposed, with this mystery was another. In the picture-gallery was an empty hook, and in the wall an empty space, whereon could be seen a half-defaced inscription. One part, however, was unpleasantly clear—the single word ‘accursed’ stood out plainly enough when a strong light was thrown there; and though it was not certain who was the object of the ban, it was supposed that it was he who should take upon himself to restore to its place the portrait which had been taken down from thence.

These things Derrick turned over in his mind, in connection with the quarryman’s words, as he sat on the dragon-headed chair in the dusk, and he fell straightway into deep reverie.

The next morning, when he waked, the demon of mischief was at his pillow repeating Zachary Pearse’s words: ‘A lad o’ the fields;’



‘ A beautiful woman o’ yor own race ;’ ‘ That were a poem, I reckon.’


‘ If,’ said Derrick to himself, as he broke the shell of his second egg at breakfast, ‘ the family disgrace turns out to be “ a poem,” I mean to be the first to throw light upon it.’ And then he sent for Mrs. Finch, and told her that he wished for some oil and a feather to be brought to him privately.

Derrick was not at all afraid of the curse of his ancestor ; he thought, as a well-read youth of modern days ought to think, that it was a parcel of superstitious nonsense. But he was afraid of the comments and gossip of his servants, so he took the precaution of supplying his needs through the medium of Mrs. Finch, whose discretion he believed he could trust.

The closed room, and the ill-lighted passage that led to it, were in a part of the house that was little used and little frequented ; Derrick therefore had no difficulty in getting there unobserved. For a long time he worked away

with the feather and oil to no profit ; his attempts at the lock were useless, but in proportion as his efforts were vain the resolve to succeed increased. At last the key began to turn, and suddenly the bolt shot back with a loud grating noise. Derrick pushed the door open, yet he did not immediately enter ; he remained standing outside with his hand upon the bolt.

Whether the young Squire's entering or not entering that room made any material difference in his history it is not for me to decide. Certainly this morning's action formed, as it were, the connecting thread upon which the story of his days was to be strung ; yet I cannot say that anything of consequence would have been changed had the closed room remained outside the sphere of his thoughts. For generations the materials of a drama are gathering together, the passions are dormant but ready, the scene is laid, the actors have met ; if an impatient hand push the curtain aside a moment too soon, it can scarcely be said that the flash of earlier knowledge, with



its touch of weird effect, has produced any change of circumstance; at most it can but slightly alter the bias of a single mind, and cause the after-events to be coloured by a hue of mystery somewhat deeper than really belongs to them.

Now that Derrick had succeeded in forcing the door, another mood followed upon that of obstinacy. After all, why should he intrude upon a secret that had been sealed so long? Was it not the family tradition to be incurious about this place, and was it worth while to risk a personal enquiry? Yet human curiosity is an uneasy desire which, when once excited, gains urgency with denial. And after all, what in the name of common-sense could such a tattered and faded piece of ancestral mystery have to do with his fresh young life? He must look upon it, of course, as a calm, impartial observer would.

Therefore, enter Derrick! Bring the sunshine of your presence here, and chase away the shadows. And never for a moment

dream, as your foot echoes in the deserted room, that you step upon the stage, an actor in the drama of your own story.

He gave the door a more violent push, and walked in. It was dark. He could see nothing. And as he groped his way forward, the air was mouldy and cold as a sepulchre in which a month-old corpse lies decaying. It was thick and noisome, it crept down his throat and seemed to choke him; spiders' webs, so thick that they felt like slimy gossamer curtains, swept over his face and clung in his hair. Whatever he touched was sticky and damp, and his feet stumbled over heaps of rotting mortar and plaster. He paused and turned to look back at the door; a ray came in from the passage and lay dimly on the rubbish-heaps on the floor, and then lost itself in the general murkiness. But as his eyes became accustomed to the darkness, he perceived that a still dimmer ray came from the right of the room; here was obviously the window. He approached, stumbling over rubbish and furniture as he did so, and then his

hands came into contact with what he felt sure was a curtain ; he gave a tug to draw it aside—a dismal rent was the consequence, but with the rent came light, still dim, but sufficient for vision. Then he observed that the window, over which the curtain had been completely drawn, was so overgrown with ivy that from the outside it was invisible. It opened on to a short flight of stone steps ; these led on to a terrace ; from thence there had been again steps to the garden originally, but they had been long blocked up. Derrick pushed back the tattered remnant of curtain, and took a survey of the room. It was furnished, he supposed, as the chamber of a lady of rank and wealth in the beginning of the eighteenth century would be. There were silken hangings and coverings to the four-post bed, and to the windows and chairs, and tapestry upon the walls. A ponderous wardrobe, an antique set of drawers, a mirror and toilet-table that had once been gaily decked were there ; and lying on the latter, left, he supposed, just as the occupant of the room had left

them, were the rotting, dust-concealed toilet appliances—the brushes, the powder and patch boxes, even, though eaten through and through with mould, the gloves and handkerchief she had worn. The appearance of ruin and decay was enhanced by portions of the ceiling having fallen upon the bed and floor ;. but in spite of the confusion and the revolting condition of decay, it was a strangely living mystery into which he had penetrated, and as he stood there surrounded by the mouldering possessions of the disgraced and long-dead Beauty, he experienced a feeling almost of shyness at his own intrusion. He would not have searched the drawers and wardrobe for worlds ; and as he mentally resolved that he would set men and maids to the work of restoration, he turned towards the door and prepared to leave the apartment. At the threshold, however, he looked back. Backward looks are proverbially luckless. Derrick's eyes caught sight of a picture which he had not noticed before. It was placed in the inside and least mouldered part of the room,

with its face disgracefully turned to the wall. Here, doubtless, was the lady of the ruined bower—the unknown Beauty—the author, perhaps, of the family ban, and the rightful occupant of the empty hook on the picture-gallery wall. He lifted it reverently from its corner, and placed it against the wardrobe opposite the light; then he took out his handkerchief and tried to remove the dust and mould from the canvas. When it was clear enough to allow the portrait to appear, he remained for long in contemplation of it; then he left the room, and closing the door, locked it behind him.

But Derrick was pale, and his eyes were startled. The secret upon which he had intruded held more of a mystery within it than at present he could fathom. The face was beautiful, as he had expected, but it was not new to his fancy. He had seen it before; he recollected that then he had said to himself it was the loveliest face he had ever beheld; and the occasion of beholding this sweet physiognomy was but recent in his life. In all

but dress—and the dress of the picture was costly and antique—it was the figure and face of Marjorie Morrison that were portrayed on the canvas.



CHAPTER VI.


ZACHARY.

‘The desire of the moth for the star,
Of the night for the morrow,
The devotion to something afar
From the sphere of our sorrow.’

SHELLEY.

MARJORIE’S home, the Cockshuthey Farm, was a long stone building which stood on the side of a hill. It was a dairy farm, and comprised about a hundred and fifty acres of pasture land. There were outhouses for the cattle, and barns for the storing of hay. It was a clean and fresh-looking place in the midst of green fields and hedges, pleasant to behold and yet not ideally beautiful ; unless the large fruit garden at

the back of the farm be excepted. This, in summer, was perfect of its kind ; a lovely place full of the scents of fruit and flowers, the hum of bees and the warmth of sunshine. The fruit was destined for the market, and every available piece of ground had been cultivated and planted; yet, where a nook or corner of soil remained unoccupied, flowers, such as lupins, lilies, hollyhocks, pinks and sweetbriar, had been set, with bushes of lavender, mint, thyme, and all sweet herbs ; while in one corner was a small bed devoted to the growth of roses, and near it an arbour running over with honeysuckle. This was Marjorio's own spot of earth—indeed, the whole garden was her special domain—but on this little patch was expended the labour of her love, and of her leisure moments. In the evening, after the cows had been driven home and milked, and the dairy-pans cleansed and re-filled with the fresh, sweet milk, and when the hens had been gathered into the fowl-house and left for the night, there was little more for her to do until the supper hour,



when she must prepare the meal for her parents and brother. Sometimes she would go to the rose-bed ; sometimes she would sit in the kitchen on the high-backed bench near the clock, and knit, stealing a glance now and then at the volume which lay open by her side. Oftenest, she would carry her book down through the garden and sit in the arbour reading, as long as the light allowed her.

To-night she stood in the door of the fowl-house, having just gathered into her apron a bunch of weeds and grass which she was tossing to the fowls for a treat, when she heard a limping step coming down the long garden walk towards her. Marjorie neither ceased from her work nor turned her head, but a smile of gentle welcome spread over her face, and as the step came near, she said :

‘It’s thee, Zachary, is it, lad?’

‘Aye, Marjorie, it’s me,’ replied the rather melancholy voice of the quarryman.

Marjorie shook the last bunch of grass away, smoothed down her apron, came out of the fowl-house, and locked the door.

‘Thou’rt a bit down to-night, Zachary?’

She stood by him for a moment holding the key in her hand, and looking round at the fruit trees with her leisurely thoughtful glance; her beautiful still face was ready for sympathy, and her tall womanly form gently acquiescent either for movement or repose. Zachary looked at her, and then turned his head away quickly, his face suffused with emotion. They began to walk slowly up the garden path, where the boughs of the fruit trees hung above them.

‘It’s almost comfort enough to look at thee, Marjorie,’ said Zachary, in a low voice.


‘Is it?’ said Marjorie quietly. ‘Ay, Zach! I’d like to be as useful as that! But I doubt it’s a comfort as won’t last. Tell me if anything is wrong.’

‘All is wrong, Marjorie.’

‘All? That’s a deal o’ misfortune.’

‘It’ll be better, maybe, when I’ve told it to thee.’

They reached the arbour, and Marjorie sat



down in her sedate stately way, and Zachary took his seat opposite. Then he leaned his arms on the table, and his chin on his hands, and looked at her. The two beautiful faces were near each other; the one full of fire and passion, the other as still and deep as a summer pool.

‘It’s all up with the quarry,’ said he suddenly.

‘How’s that, lad?’

‘It’s over the rent.’

‘What! Hastna thou paid?’

‘No, Marjorie. I doubt I’ve been wrong. I never told thee. I expect if I had that it wouldna have happened.’

‘Th’ Squire ull never be hard,’ put in Marjorie gently.

‘I’ve seen the Squire. He sent for me. He is hard.’

‘Nay, nay!’ said she quickly; ‘that I’ll niver believe.’

‘Hast seen him?’ asked Zachary incredulously.

A beautiful tinge of colour came into

Marjorie's cheek, but she betrayed neither confusion nor emotion.

‘Aye; I’ve seen him.’

‘At the treat, I reckon. Old Scrag said he were there. And a bonnie grey eye and a straight leg go a long way with a ’ooman. They think the inside’s always to match. But he’s a hard one, I tell thee.’

‘He’s niver pressing thee for a half-year’s rent!’ exclaimed Marjorie indignantly.

‘Worse than that.’

‘What dosto mean, lad?’

Zachary flung his arms upon the table and buried his face in them.

‘It’s three years’ rent that he wants!’

Marjorie’s eyes flashed with astonishment; she was silent for two or three minutes, and then said steadily:

‘If it’s three years’ rent—though I canna believe it, Zachary—then the Squire’s *not* hard. He may well press thee. But thou dost na mean it?’

‘It’s three years’ rent as I owe him,’ persisted Zachary, without raising his head.

There was genuine distress in Marjorie's face.

'How iver hast thou come to this, lad ? Thou never told me. Three years' rent ! Lord help thee, Zachary ! How has it been ? Hast made no money ?'

'Aye ! I've made money. But not as much as I might and ought, by a deal. And the little that I have made——'

He broke off. Spoken to her ear and drawn to the light of her eyes, things looked very differently from what they did when he thought them over alone. He continued in a low, hesitating voice :

'Seems like that I've been led astray, Marjorie. I doubt it were the books.'

'Them as thou lent me ?' she asked anxiously.

'Some on 'em—such as thou could read.'

Marjorie saw that he had difficulty in opening his heart as he wished. She strove to fathom this mysterious matter herself, and thus to save him the little that she could.

'Lad,' said she gravely and sadly, 'thou

dost na mean—thou canst na mean—that thou's used any o' the money as should ha' gone to th' rent for the books, and for thy drawing and mathematic lessons.'

'That's about it,' said Zachary.

'Then thou's robbed not th' Squire only, but thee feyther.'

Zachary started visibly, and lifted his face.

'Good Lord, Marjorie! I niver thought o' that.'

'But I doubt it is so, lad. Who rents the quarry? Is it thine or hisn?'

'Hisn! Aye! It's my feyther's.'

'And he pays thee and a mon out o' his savings t' work it for him?'

'He gives me board and lodge and so much i' the ton.'

'And he trustens thee with all the arrangements?'

'Aye!'

'Dost see it now, lad?' asked Marjorie, kindly but gravely.

'I see it. Lord help me, Marjorie!'

There was silence between the two for a

time. Both sat with their eyes fixed on the bushes outside—Zachary's dark and mournful, and Marjorie's tenderly sympathetic. Her full sweet voice broke the silence.

'The books and the teaching thou would have, dosto see, ha' been to thee like the angel o' light as were the devil i' disguise. They seemed to be bringing thee help, yet they've robbed thee o' thy upright mind, Zach, o' somehows. I tak' blame to mysel', as though I'd helped thee to wrung. I were main pleased wi' thy books. But I should ha' bethought me as how a village lad could scarce be able to buy 'em. Little I knew as thou were paying out o' thy character, Zach! Ay! it's an ill thing when we put *that* out to pawn. But thou sees it, lad. And it's kind o' comfort to know it, for thou'll pick up the right road again quickly.'

'Lass, if any hond can lead me there, it's thine. But I see no way. What mun I do?'

'Do, lad? Why! sell the books, o' course, and tak' th' money to the Squire, and ask him for time o'er the rest. He winna be

hard. I'd be ill-pleased to think as a heavy punishment must fall upon thee. Nay! I canna think that.'

A spasm of pain shot over Zachary's face, and he drew in his breath sharply.

'Sell the books! Aye! "Sell all that thou hast," like the young man i' the Gospel. It's same as that to me. Marjorie! Marjorie! even *thou* dost na know what I feel!'

Zachary rocked himself backwards and forwards, overcome with a grief that had something of the passionate sense of injustice mingled in it.

'Aye!' he burst out presently; 'it's same as selling my soul. Though I doubt, as *thou* sees things, thou'd say as I'd sold *that* already. Lass! thy mind is a sweet clean page upo' which thou canst only write "Duty." But mine! it's scored o'er and o'er wi' thoughts and dreamings. I canna *see*, while times, for my dreams. I canna work at chiselling a stone as I should, for my dreams. I'm i' a mist—a beautiful mist—as is filled wi' visions and wonders. The light o' common day is

na common to me. And *here* '—he struck his breast with his hand—'is a thirst I canna rightly describe. And it comes o'er me at times that if iver a mon had a right, mine is the right to satisfy that thirst. The books, the statues and the pictures up at th' Hall, they still me for a while; they're like the clear stream to the parched throat. Who's a right,' he added fiercely, 'to drive me away? Or to send me desperate by compelling me to chisel stones *square*? Am na I cheated o' my life? And is na that worse than cheating Maister Derrick o' his rent? It's wi' my blood—real heart-blood—as I mun pay him, if I pay him at all. And where's the justice o' that? What's a guinea to him, more or less? But my life is my all.'

He paused, rather from excess of emotion than because he had sufficiently unburdened himself. Marjorie was carried away by his passion; her sympathy had been touched from the beginning; now the way he put things struck her imagination at first like the light of a new truth. But simplicity and

clearness of mind were some of her attributes, and after a few minutes of silent bewilderment, during which Zachary buried his face again in his arms, her countenance cleared, and she took up the thread of the discourse in the same sweet voice as before.

‘ I know, Zachary, thou hast thoughts such as I canna follow ; and that thou art main clever and learned above most. But maybe them as is outside these fine visions and dreams can see a bit straighter over the road. If thou lays thy life against guineas it makes thy blood boil, and it sets Maister Derrick i’ a light as canna be true. He has na asked aught but his due ; and think how ’twould be had iveryone treated him as thou hast ? Thou’s used a mon’s goods without paying—that’s it i’ plain ; and I dunna see where anger comes in rightly from *thee*, without thou deals it out to thyself’. Thou hast na been working, I’m thinking. Zach, if there’s ought as thou wants as bad as thou says, it’s better to tak’ the long slow way at the winning than to make a great jump to the end

and break thee neck i' so doing. Better die o' thy thirst, Zach, than wear a sore stain on thy mind; and thou's wronged thy poor old feyther, I doubt.'

'Marjorie, thou'rt painting me black!'

'Nay, lad, nay!' cried the girl earnestly. 'I feel for thee, Zach, I canna say how; and I should na do that if I thought thee were bad. But o' times it's best cure to look a thing well i' the face. Nay, lad, indeed! though I reckon thou's made a slip somehows into wrong, I seem to see thee at th' same time wi' thy *mind* clear.'

'If I only had *thee*, Marjorie, always,' said the lad, in a low impassioned voice, 'I believe I could settle down then and work like the rest—aye, as quiet and content as anyone.'

'Thou can come any time same as before, and I wish it were true as I could do thee some good.'

'Nay, Marjorie; *not* the same as before!' said Zachary, beginning to tremble. 'Love me, Marjorie, my lass, and save me!'

'Lad, I do not understand thee.'

‘Be my wife, Marjorie; that’s what I mean. Promise me that—as far off as thou wilt—only promise, and thou’ll niver hear wrong o’ me again.’

It was Marjorie’s turn to become pale and to be troubled; but there was no flush or flutter of emotion, and her eyes only looked pained.

‘If thou does na love right for it own sake thou’ll niver love it for mine, lad.’

‘Dunna speak to me so quiet and calm,’ said Zachary, in a low voice; ‘tell me thou’ll love me a little.’

‘I canna, Zachary, unless thou means as a friend.’

There was a look almost of hurt surprise in her face.

‘Marjorie, could na thou fancy me iver?’

‘No, lad, no; not i’ that way!’

‘I’m not fit for thee—I know it. Thou’rt as lovely as a summer day, and I’m nought but a crippled ne’er-do-weel. How shouldst thou love a lad wi’ a leg like this?’

He pushed out the distorted limb sadly as he spoke.

‘Don’t, Zach, *don’t!*’ cried Marjorie imploringly, her eyes suddenly shining with tears. ‘If there were one thing on earth as could make me love thee, it ’ud be that. But dost na thou see there’s things we *can’t make* ourselves do? and I know i’ my heart as——’

She broke off from very pity and trouble, and because the tears choked her utterance.

‘Go on,’ he said gently.

‘If I *could* love thee I would, Zach; but I *know* I canna, not *iver!*’

He flung himself down on the table with a sob, and then was still. Marjorie looked pitifully at him, rather as a mother might grieve over a child. At last she rose from her seat, and, bending tenderly towards him, ventured to touch his hand.

‘I *did na* mean to be hard. Let us forget it, Zachary, and be friends again same as before.’

‘Don’t, Marjorie, lass,’ said he in a low voice, without looking up, and withdrawing

his fingers ; ' thou'rt only a maid, and thou dost na understand.'

He felt that the full-grown passion which he had been hugging, and which tore him now, had never even touched her.

' Zachary, I hear father calling over the garden. I *must* go now ; and yet I canna unless thou'll say as thou forgives me !'

' I forgive thee, my lass ; I've niver blamed thee. I've rushed straight on my ruin o' all sides—that's all !'

He lifted his wan face and tried to smile. Marjorie turned away to hide her tears, and went weeping up the long garden path back into the house.



CHAPTER VII.


THE MINISTER.

‘When a man of this narrow religion becomes entangled in affairs of the world, he carries into them no clear, calm feeling of sacred obligation to guide him in the path of noble uprightness ; but rather a conscience half afraid to find himself there at all.’—MARTINEAU.

MILLTOWN was a place sacred to trade and manufactures—a town which devoted every hour to toil and bargaining, and spared no moment for culture, beauty, and leisure. Of these it knew nothing ; it never paused to consider that life was being squandered in pursuit and enjoyment murdered by competition, nor did its inhabitants question themselves as to their object in thus striving to amass wealth. They were not, for the most part, of the kind to

whom money is useful ; those varieties of happiness which it prepares for some would have been distasteful to them ; they had simply lost the power of ceasing from effort, had dropped the faculty of being glad and of discriminating between beauty and ugliness.

The money-making instinct was second nature to the richer part of the town, and the instinct of toil to the poorer. It was not in them to complain that the blue of heaven was blackened by smoke, or that the crowded streets presented the extremity of dreariness to the eye ; and on Sunday, when the slight picturesqueness, which may be seen in the costume and bearing of honest toil, was exchanged for dismal church and chapel going respectability, no one exclaimed at the hideous vulgarity which the place put on. When the mill-girls doffed the gay-coloured shawl or handkerchief for the unspeakable eccentricity of the Sunday bonnet, then, indeed, did the tendency to blue-paint and tattooing—the untamed savage in the nature—advertise itself ;




when the men left off their working-jackets and writhed and stumbled along in ill-fitting broadcloth, then, indeed, did one question the relevancy of the words which speak of 'the human form divine.' Yet these were symbols—fantastic traditions of the forlorn dream of beauty and comeliness which in generations past must have flickered through the human heart. And there were other signs: the pictorial humour of the people was stereotyped in their racy tongue, in the unconscious wit which dropped from their lips in daily speech; it was marked, too, in the morbid wonder—really the thirst for renovating change—which set the town agape at any occurrences of horror and sadness; it was manifested in better fashion in the touches of true poetry which flashed sometimes through a man's words and experience, showing that human life will assert its grandeur amid the most dreary and hopeless surroundings.

This was the place into which Saul Howell, the accomplished scholar, brought his culture and the concentrated energy of his nature.

He was of the stuff which too intently absorbs itself in a single idea; he plunged, as it were, into the flame, and allowed it to consume him. And when he first enrolled himself as a minister of Christ, choosing the form of Dissent because his opinions debarred him from the Church, he embraced the self-denial and deprivation consequent on his position with something like exultation.

The play and colour of life was scarce enough at Milltown to begin with; but he voluntarily eliminated from his days the little that remained to him; and when deprived of the companionship of refined and educated minds, he refused in addition the wonderful solace which books can bring, putting off the world as it was presented in well-filled book-shelves, and giving up his time to poring over theology, devotional volumes, and the Bible.

The holiness and achievement of the saints of the Middle Ages had touched his imagination and fired his ambition: Savonarola and Loyola were his heroes. Why not recall to



earth something of the spirit which had animated them ? Why not re-apply the austere methods which had once been successful ? Aiming by greater concentration to acquire insight such as theirs, he bound down his life to the narrowness and intensity of a monk's.

Saul Howell had forgotten the relativity of things ; the burning concentration which fitted the needs of the fifteenth or sixteenth centuries, and which then led the way to vigorous achievement, becomes in the nineteenth the shutting in of self upon self. According to the opinion of Goethe, Hamlet's is a nature which, being too slight for the greatness of action thrust upon it, breaks under the strain ; but there is a strain of another sort, with an outcome not less deplorable—that is, when a deep nature and large intellect are condemned to an action too small for them.

This was the case with the young minister. Although in his duties to his congregation he had wholesome human work which kept him partly in health, the neglect of the true food

for his intellect—a food which lay before him in the open Book of Revelation comprised in the knowledge and achievement of his age—resulted in spiritual and mental attenuation, in an alternate flatness and fever of the imagination. Especially whatever he *felt* took too great a possession of him. The liberal breadth of his judgment, the true Christian wholesomeness and calm, began to forsake him : he lived in an atmosphere at once of unreality and of over-vivid consciousness. At last he began to be dimly aware that his position galled him, and that life tasted flat to his palate ; in short, the nineteenth-century scholar discovered that through an effort of will he could by no means compel himself back into the Middle Ages, and that Nature, forcibly shut out from the gates, might storm the walls of the citadel in anger.

A revulsion had set in about six months before the opening of our story. Yet it came in no sharp shock : it appeared rather like the dawning of a new day.


One day it chanced that a volume of

Darwin's fell into his hands. He read it eagerly. Straightway the bands with which he had swathed his intellect were ready to fall from him. His mind had too truly the power of growth within it for him to ignore the striking thoughts which the discoveries of science opened out to him ; it was impossible to forbid himself any longer to trespass outside the one circle, and he began the study of works by the best scientific and philosophical authors of the day with avidity, believing that he saw therein the Hand of God instructing him. Forthwith into his sermons came a fire and zest that took his hearers by storm, and attracted new followers ; and the play and colour which he had begun to allow within his starving days gave a relish to his existence which had long been wanting. Yet he approached, be it remembered, this new life with a hectic and unbalanced mind.

In the midst of this ferment of fresh growth and happiness, Marjorie Morrison came one morning to his chapel, accompanied by Zachary Pearse. The minister made her acquaintance.

And forthwith the new heavens and the new earth were complete.

Two evenings after Zachary Pearse had had his interview with the Squire, Mr. Howell returned home after a couple of days' absence. It was a chilly evening; he came in dusty and tired, and was rejoiced to find himself once more in his tolerably pleasant sitting-room, with a cheerful fire burning, a meal spread ready upon the table, and, above all, a parcel awaiting him containing, he knew, a volume recently ordered from the bookseller's. He had been spending two days in most uncongenial companionship, and his home presented an agreeable contrast. He looked round with the fond eye of possession on the book-shelves wherein various new faces, the later purchases of enlightened days, might be seen, and promising himself an evening of uninterrupted reading and pleasure, sat down to tea. Such was his programme; one destined, like many other human programmes, not to be fulfilled. Hardly had he taken his seat, than he started



as if an asp had bitten him. A letter lay on the plate before him; it had been ostentatiously placed there to attract attention. It was two days' old; the arms and motto of the Devonportes was the seal, and the handwriting was Derrick's. Mr. Howell slowly opened and read it:

‘DEAR HOWELL,

‘Come over and dine with me some evening soon, and talk over old times. I shall be glad also to ask your advice on all sorts of questions relating to the welfare of my tenants: you could always play Mentor to perfection.

‘Yours,

‘D. L. D.’

Mr. Howell laid aside the letter, and put his fork into his chop. A minute before, it had sputtered pleasantly and invitingly on his plate; now it was an indigestible morsel which from habit and necessity must be got rid of in the usual way. He made short

work with his meal, not because he was hungry and despatched the viands, but because he took little of them. When it was over, he rose and stood leaning against the mantelpiece, reflecting. For several reasons he had much rather not have received the invitation from Derrick; suspicion of an unworthy light-mindedness in the young Squire had occurred to him, and he had no wish to place himself again in an unsuitable position. On the whole, he had decided that he and Devonporte would see nothing of each other, and that it would be well that it should be so; their paths lay widely apart, and he felt sure that there could be no real sympathy between himself and the brilliant young son of good luck. At the same time there was in the letter a hint of a more earnest purpose, and the voice within forbad him to neglect the request for help from a fellow-creature. As he stood debating between a sense of duty and an unusual disinclination to follow it, his remarkable and spiritualized countenance was lifted, the fair waves of hair being tossed

back; and the contrast between the serene lips and the prophetic trouble of the brow and eyes was most strongly marked. In the end, his decision was that he must accept Derrick's invitation; he wrote a note to that effect, and sent it to the post. Then he sat down to read.

Hardly, however, had he got through half a dozen pages, than the servant entered with the unwelcome announcement that a young woman had called and wished to see him. Mr. Howell, looking up from his book, inquired what name she had given.

'No name, sir,' replied the servant; 'she's a stranger here, I think; she looks like a country-woman, and has walked a good distance.'

'You can show her up,' said the minister reluctantly.

The quiet evening was beginning to disperse. His eyes dropped back to the page, and he managed to get through a few lines hastily; they were the cordial which was to prepare him for what he felt convinced would

be a somewhat dreary interview. He still lingered over the words, when he heard the door close softly upon some one who had entered. Then he rose to welcome the intruder, and his eyes fell upon Marjorie Morrison, who stood diffidently awaiting his attention. It was to Saul Howell almost as great a wonder as though the San Sistine Madonna had forsaken the canvas and appeared in living presence on his threshold. Marjorie wore a blue linsey gown, and had a coloured shawl twisted about her head and shoulders; upon her arm, however, she carried no miraculous child; she had a pleasant-looking little basket, from which flowers and leaves were peeping; nor did she herself appear like any far-away and abstracted saint; she was a warm flesh-and-blood woman, who embodied in herself Saul Howell's earliest dream — and more than the dream — of womanly loveliness. She stood raising her beautiful eyes to the minister with anxiety and something like awe in them, and with a lovely rose-blush overspreading her cheeks.

Saul came forward mechanically, shaking himself free as he did so from the inclination to sit still and fall into pagan worship.

‘ Good-evening, Marjorie. Have you walked all the way from Hollyss ? You are tired, I am sure. Sit down near the fire.’

His voice was gentle and melodious ; it had full, rich tones. He had extended his hand while speaking ; Marjorie, perhaps, did not see it ; she slightly inclined her knees in a rustic curtsy. This primitive action, however, did not detract from the stateliness of her bearing ; rather, it gave her an old-world grace.

‘ Thank yo kindly, sir. But I’ll give yo father’s message first. He sent yo a few new-laid eggs as he begs yor acceptance of. And I made so bold as to add a few flowers from my garden.’

‘ That was kind, Marjorie. Will you thank your father for me ? I shall enjoy the eggs, I am sure ; and the flowers are a great pleasure.’

He wished to relieve her of the basket ;

but Marjorie smiled and eluded him, and stepped towards the table, saying:

‘They’re very breakable, Mr. Howell. Had na I better lay them out here for yo?’

The young man stood by while the shapely hands deftly lifted one white egg after another from the basket, and laid them softly on the table. He thought he had never seen anything so lovely as the movement of her arm; his eyes wandered over the beautiful face and still more beautiful form; amaze at her presence in his room, and joy that she was there, were mingled with fear lest he should be unable to detain her. Coupled with the modest deference of her manner to him, there had always been an unapproachableness as of a goddess; he had never got nearer than distance since he had known her, nor spoken words whose necessary triviality had not pained him; and now she had come of her own accord to his home, her busy hands were ministering to his pleasure; and the door was shut upon them. Howell trembled lest the

next instant should dispel his unlooked-for happiness.

‘Marjorie,’ he said softly, when the heaps of flowers—pinks and lupins, pansies and roses—were laid upon his table, diffusing a deliciously fresh sweet odour, ‘I fear that my awkward hands could never manage to arrange them. Could you find the time to stay and do it for me?’

Marjorie’s dark lashes, which since she had begun to empty the basket had remained provokingly curled over her peach-like cheeks, lifted suddenly, and disclosed her eyes with so full and glad a smile in them that it sent a great tremour through the minister’s heart.

‘Aye! that I will, sir, and welcome.’

Mr. Howell took a pair of vases from his mantelshelf and filled them with water from a carafe, and handed them to her.

‘Won’t you sit down, Marjorie?’

‘I’ll stand, thank yo, sir. I can see my work better.’

Mr. Howell retired to the fireplace and watched her movements from his armchair.

Her busy presence in his room in the evening hour seemed like the wonderful realization of a dream which, in its remoteness, had scarcely grown even to the force of a dream. He grudged the speed and deftness with which she put the blossoms together, and wished that she would have lingered over the work.

What further excuse should he find for detaining her? The last flower was cleared from the table now; she had finished the work, and lifting the vases, approached the fireplace to put them back on the shelf; then she stood looking at them critically. Howell sought for the magic word which should have the power to hold her a little longer, and which must be spoken now or not at all. He had no need to seek, however; apparently satisfied with the result of her arrangement, she turned and said gravely and anxiously:

‘Sir, could you spare me a little more time?’

‘Certainly,’ replied Mr. Howell, concealing the wild upleap of his gladness by a gentle

and encouraging smile ; ' I have the evening before me. Sit down and rest.'

Marjorie, without hesitation, took the chair opposite to him, and tossed aside the encumbering handkerchief. The firelight played over her auburn hair, her eyes were fixed meditatively upon the flame, and her hands were crossed upon her knees. Mr. Howell, breathlessly wondering, with a great human tide of hope and passion and suspense beating in his heart, sat still, and watched and waited.

' Yo'll maybe have acquaintance with Maister Derrick, the Squire o' Hollyss, sir ?' said Marjorie, darting a glance towards him.

Again Mr. Howell felt the bite of the asp at his heart.

' I do know him, Marjorie. What then ?'

' Only,' said she, beginning to speak with precipitate hurry, ' if *yo* know him, being the minister and so wise and great as *yo* are, *yo'll* have the power to lead and guide him, if so be as *yo* think right to use it, Maister Howell.'

Mr. Howell lowered his eyes and passed

his hand over his face. Wise and great! There was nothing in his heart but confusion and fear.

‘I am not wise and great, child. I may not have the power you think. But explain yourself, Marjorie.’

He kept his hand over his eyes, and in this posture, which seemed to his visitor only expressive of natural fatigue, waited for what should come next.

‘It’s for his favour and kindness to a friend o’ mine—a dear, dear friend that I long to serve—as I’m asking yo to sue for,’ said Marjorie. ‘There’s no one else as I know to ask but yo, and if I tell yo the tale, being a minister o’ Christ, I *know* yo winna be hard.’

In her anxiety she slipped more and more into the familiar dialect. As for Saul Howell, he experienced a sudden great relief. Clearly Marjorie had no conscious influence over the Squire, or now was the time when she would have used it.

‘Who is this friend, and what is his trouble?’ asked the minister, leaning forward

in his seat, with his face full of the gentle interest which came easily to him when a story of human sorrow or joy was told.

‘Yo’ll listen? And thank yo kindly, sir,’ said Marjorie, her voice full of feeling.

And then she repeated as much as was necessary of the story of Zachary Pearse’s trouble. It was for his sake that she had traversed the distance between Hollyss and Milltown; it was to explain and ask aid for his case that she was here.


‘Yo see, sir,’ she ended, ‘Zachary is na like the rest o’ us. His head, poor lad, is full o’ thoughts and dreams. God only knows if he’ll bring ’em to completion i’ the end; but seems like at times when he tells ’em to me, as though he ’ud niver be fit for such work as chiselling stones.’

‘Marjorie,’ said Mr. Howell, rising as she rose, ‘I believe it is given to me to help about this. The Squire and I shall meet soon, and already my thoughts had dwelt with interest upon the lad Zachary Pearse.’

The girl was tying her handkerchief under

her chin now, and she looked up to the minister's face as she did so with gratitude and awed confidence. It was so in her heart that Zachary should be helped, and this man of God had not driven her entreaties away with demur and cold moralities; the erring sheep had been found worthy of the interest of this shepherd. What could not one like him achieve? She knew, she was sure, that Zachary was saved.

The young minister looked down at the lovely face upturned to him in its beautiful kindness and unconsciousness, and back into the great tender eyes. The passion and love within him confused his insight and made him dream that he saw there the dawn of its reflection. He wished for the word which might impress without startling her, for the action which might give her the hint. But something in the girl's innocence and stateliness threw over him a subtle restraint. He merely raised his hand suddenly and placed it on her head, saying, in a voice that shook with suppressed feeling :



‘The Lord bless thee and keep thee, Marjorie.’

Marjorie’s eyes had fallen, she had bent her head and folded her hands with a grave dignity in response to the blessing. Then, curtseying low, she took up her basket and left the room.

It was almost dark when she got into the street, but her thoughts were full of hope for Zachary, and relief at the success of her mission, and she did not notice it. A few paces, however, from the minister’s house, a tall young man in the dress of a farmer turned out of an archway, where he had evidently been awaiting her, and came to her side.

‘I made so bold as to follow thee, Marjorie,’ said he, in a diffident tone ; ‘Milltown is na the place for thee to traverse thy lone by night.’

‘And thank thee, Abe lad ; I’m fain o’ a bit o’ company.’

The light from a street lamp flashed upon her cheek for a second, and showed it perceptibly paler.



CHAPTER VIII.

DISREPUTABLE OLD SCRAG.

‘He shall live a man forbid.’

Macbeth.

WITCHES and wizards have faded out of the popular belief, as have fairies and many other traditions, both gloomy and picturesque. Nevertheless, simple country folk have too great a delight in the faculty of wonder, and its reflection mystery, to give up their hold upon the ground of the inexplicable ; and the persecuting spirit, which has its pleasurable side, needs must have an object. So that, though they have forgotten all about the black cat, the broomstick, the magic circle and so on, there is often some notable character living in their midst, who is

the focus of their wonder, their dislike perhaps, but certainly of their awe.


Old Scrag was such an one. He lived in Moorfield, an estate bordering upon Hollyss ; but his fame extended throughout both villages. It had even reached Milltown : here, however, it died out ; for the imagination of this place required more stimulating food—such as deaths and accident, murder and suicide—an unfathomable personality being quite too insipid for a satisfying feast.

No one knew what Old Scrag's Christian name was ; in younger days he had been 'Scrag ;' now that years had told upon him, the epithet 'Old' had been added. The Church party believed that he had never been regenerated by baptism ; the Dissenting were sure that he would die unconverted. In appearance he was a hale old man with keen black eyes, a fine straight nose, iron-grey hair, and a white beard. He wore knee-breeches of corduroy, and blue stockings : he had also a knitted blue Jersey cap ; he carried a staff in his hand, which he shook with muttered

execrations at the crowd of children who were apt to collect in his rear, fascinated by the terror of his presence. Wherever Scrag had gone before, troops of little miscreants were to be met flying panic-stricken from his attacks.

Old Scrag was of a deeply melancholy mind ; he was one who feared neither God nor man ; he resisted all the popular customs, opinion and thought ; he took up nothing because other people had adopted it, but had ideas of his own. This was, of course, enough to earn him an unflattering notice. Yet, I cannot say that Scrag was enlightened ; he had character without guidance, antagonism without reasonableness ; and the result was in a certain lurid force of nature, unvented in any special direction save that of opposition.

In early youth, Old Scrag had followed the calling of his father—he had been a weaver, one of those who worked the old-fashioned looms in their own houses ; and, although since that day Scrag's trades had been many



and various, he still retained in his conversation a large percentage of words which alluded to his ancient craft. His cottage still possessed the upper chamber—with the long low window running along the whole side of the house—which had once been his father's weaving-shed ; it was built on the border between Moorfield and Hollyss, and was the only example of such a reminiscence of the craft which Moorfield possessed. It lay in a nook of the hills, in a somewhat rocky and wild surrounding called 'Ouzel Hole,' the type of the country in Moorfield more nearly resembling that on the other side of Milltown (where on the bleak hillsides old weaving-sheds were plentiful enough) than the rich undulating farm-land at Hollyss.

In his cottage at Ouzel Hole, Old Scrag's family consisted of himself, an unmarried sister, his widowed sister Mrs. Greenhough, and her son Abel Greenhough. Abel worked ahead-manager on the largest farm at Hollyss, which was usually called 'Christie's Farm ;' and he was the young man who has twice made

his appearance as Marjorie Morrison's champion and protector.

A relationship to Old Scrag was the most unlucky thing that could have happened to a young man, and Abel suffered considerably from it. The villagers were not particular in discriminating between uncle and nephew, and Abel stood well within the shadow that was cast by Scrag. He was shunned by all the respectable families on account of his kinship with the old reprobate; and although he had earned a certain reputation as a steady and clever man, and a successful farm labourer, no family would be induced to accept him in their midst on friendly and equal terms. It is difficult to describe the strength which this unreasonable prejudice reached in the village; it was all the more immovable in that it had its root in ignorance, and was supported by a shabby feeling of superior respectability in those who indulged in it. It is so flattering to the vanity to find a fellow-creature whose ignominy can afford a pedestal for one's own virtue. 'Stand by, for I am holier than thou,'

are most satisfying words to pronounce, and Abel's ears had been surfeited with variations on that theme from infancy. His early boyhood had been embittered by taunts, and although he had outlived this active form of persecution, a deep loneliness had come into his life ; this had given a touch to his character which otherwise might not have been there. He was frank and open-hearted enough, and his physique was splendid, but a certain sadness and reserve marked him from other men.

Mrs. Greenhough, Abel's mother, resembled her brother, Old Scrag. In her youth she had been a handsome woman, and in temper she was gentle and unexact. These charms had attracted a son of one of the good old yeomanry families in the county ; but in her marriage with Greenhough she by no means would consent to acknowledge that she had taken a step up in life ; the Scrags, though down in the world now, had been well-to-do weavers for several generations, and even in the present managed to retain their old house

in Moorfield. When her husband died she brought her one child to reside with her brother, proudly contenting herself with the isolation of his household. It was not a happy home : Ann Scrag was a bitter-natured woman, inclined towards the mournful view of life ; and the child, growing up in this atmosphere, and learning from his earliest years to regard himself as a tabooed creature, took to himself first a strong power of self-repression, and then of silent study and thought. As he grew up, he turned out not only handsome as his uncle and mother had been, but exceedingly clever with that practical kind of cleverness which is able to combine an inclination towards books with an unwonted physical activity.

While yet a boy, he came across a broken-down drunken old scholar, who had once been a university man, and who now earned a scanty living by teaching the children of tradespeople in Milltown. This man was glad enough to receive the few shillings which Abel could manage to spare from his earnings,

l in return to teach him Latin and German,
d to give him a host of miscellaneous
'ormation besides. Abel soon discerned
at to satisfy his own ambition money was
cessary ; he therefore worked hard, and
thout complaint, at his avocation of farm-
g, and rose speedily, as far as a recognition
his working powers went, into a prominent
sition in the village.

Once, however, he had been out of work,
d then he seized the opportunity of entreat-
g his uncle to allow him to spend some of
s savings in seeing a little of the world.
d Scrag, so far from demurring, added to
s little store from savings of his own, and
at him off to London. Here Abel got work
a book-shop, and here he remained for two
ars, reading with avidity and hearing every-
ing that there was within reach to hear ;
at the active life in the country really suited
s nature best. He returned for a short
oliday, and during that time heard that
ristie wanted a head-manager ; also in those
w days he met Marjorie Morrison, who had

grown into a woman during his absence. The young fellow's fate was instantly sealed: he threw up his situation, took the one at Christie's farm, and made his uncle's house his home.

But though Abel had returned to Moorfield, he by no means intended to settle down to a vegetative life. He brought his enlarged experience and knowledge with him, and set to work to apply it to his present surroundings. The revolutionary spirit he had imbibed early enough from his uncle; in London he had met with socialistic writings, and even with men who made it the object of their lives to disseminate socialistic opinions; his young blood was fired by the ideas presented to him, which struck not only upon all that was generous within him, but which also found a note of response from whatever had been bitter in his old experience. This bitterness he found was now repeated, being dealt out to him in heavier measure when his unusual opinions were discovered by the villagers; as Old Scrag's nephew, respectability would have

avoided Abel Greenhough, but soon it avoided him still more for his own sake.

One firm friend alone remained to him, and this was Zachary Pearse. The Pearses had always been friendly with the Scrags and Greenhoughs. A predominating gentleness of nature in the first-mentioned family prevented them from adopting the attitude which the rest of the village assumed; and so Abel and Zachary were early thrown into each other's society, and managed to establish a sort of co-operative friendship. Each one had somewhat to bestow upon the other in the way of knowledge and help, and the two lads met for the purpose of studying together and imparting mutual instruction. Abel, by several years the elder of the two, had by far the most general learning; but Zachary, on the other hand, had the inspiration of genius and remarkable mathematical ability.


The subject of Marjorie Morrison was never broached by either of them; neither knew the secret of the other. Abel soon discovered how ill-received his suit would be by her family,

yet he had not scrupled, ever since his return three years ago, to make his feelings known to her by a silent but constant homage.

John Morrison, Marjorie's brother, had made overtures of friendship to him. These at first Abel had accepted eagerly; but by-and-bye a strange distrust of the man crept into his heart. Eager to hear of revolutionary and socialistic opinions, the basis of John's desires in this direction never were wholly apparent to Abel: a false ring in his words, a sense of somewhat hidden behind, caused him to be careful of his own confidences, and to withdraw as much as was possible from John's.

Meanwhile matters arrived at the point at which our story found them. Abel's return had happened long ago, and was a settled fact in Old Scrag's mind, who kept up his friendliness with the Pearses, and was fond of wandering to the house on a Saturday afternoon, or a sunny morning, to enjoy a gossip there.

On Saturday afternoon of the week in which



Zachary had had his interviews with the Squire and Marjorie, he appeared with his staff, his blue stockings and jersey cap, and his long white beard, at the door of the cottage, bringing with him the atmosphere of excitement and interest which always accompanied him. They were all at home: William Pearse, the gentle old father, with Zachary's wistful dark eyes, but none of his fire and genius, seated by the fire; Zachary himself leaning abstractedly against the doorway; Lavinia, his sister, a feminine pattern of the father, only with mild blue eyes instead of brown, holding a large worsted stocking on her small thin arm and darning industriously; and Mrs. Pearse, the mother—the one loud, ungente, incongruous element—passing in and out of the back kitchen into the front with clatter of clogs and many words.

‘ Well, William, and how arto ? ’ asked Scrag, seating himself on the settle, his old face wrinkling into rare kindliness as Pearse glanced up with the dumb affectionate look of

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‘Ay! I’m doing rarely, Scrag, rarely,’ said William, with a kind of contented purr.

‘Rarely?’ interrupted Mrs. Pearse, coming in from the back kitchen and shouting. ‘What dost make such soft talk as that for? Thou’rt done, I tell thee; thou’rt done!’

‘H’m—h’m,’ said William gently, as Mrs. Pearse, having delivered this encouraging tonic, retired. ‘I shall last for a bit, Scrag, I think. And how’s Abe getting on?’

‘Well, he’s working on at Devonporte’s big farm. I say *Devonporte*, because yo may as well call a thing by its right name; and what’s the use o’ saying “Christie’s Farm,” when he only rents it from Devonporte. Rent? I’d have all o’ them scrooging landlords hanged. If folks had their rights, Abe ’ud have a farm o’ his own.’

‘Is he upon th’ outlook?’

‘Aye! If he’d only look i’ the right place. But he’s got it i’ his yed that he mun have a farm i’ Hollyss or nowhere. And he’ll bide his time till he sees an opening. Seems as if he’d got th’ pattern o’ Hollyss on his loom,

and could na weave aught else. He's saving a bit, too. But I say he may wait till judgment-day winds up farming, afore he'll get one i' Hollyss.'

'What makes him hanker after Hollyss, I wonder?' said Mrs. Pearse, re-appearing suddenly, like bad weather.

'He'll maybe be courting,' said old Pearse. 'I reckon that no one would wed "Old Scrag's" nephew,' said that worthy grimly. 'Hast heard anything o' them stuck-up Morrisons o' late?'

'Nought more than ordinary.'

'They do say as old Morrison's son John is a bit wild—sez he means to go soldiering, and won't stick to th' farming. Some say he gets a bit tight now and again.'

'Them as hankers after soldiering comes to the gallows,' said Mrs. Pearse, flinging a wide generalization from the back kitchen.

'Aye! They should get him t' go and hear th' minister at th' chapel i' Milltown,' said old Pearse; 'he's a wunnerful mon, is the minister; he'd maybe do John Morrison a bit

o' good. I reckon yo know Maister Howell, Scrag ?'

'No ; I dunnot.'

'Aye ! yo dun.'

'I tell yo I dunnot. Who is he ?'

'Why, he's th' minister at Milltown.'

'Oh aye ! Then I reckon he's one o' them fellows as is always interferin' betwixt th' Lord Almighty and His creeturs.'

'Oh, he's a hardworking mon is Maister Howell, I tell thee,' put in William uncomfortably.

'I tell yo it's nought o' th' sort, mon. He's just interferin' 'twixt the Almighty and His creeturs ; and I'd like to know how much he's paid for't. Didst iver hear o' owd Broadbent, the Rector o' Hollyss, coming to our house when I were down ? He sez, "Scrag," he sez, "I hope yo'll mak yor peace with yor Creator.' I sez, "I niver knowed as there were aught wrong betwixt us." And he sez, "This is a solemn time, Scrag ; and I really hope yo'll make yor peace wi' the Lord." And I sez, "I tell yo He's nought agin me

that I knows on ; and we dunnot need yo t' interfere." Owd Broadbent, he niver coomed t' our house after that.'

'H'm,' was the dubious but inoffensive reply with which William gently evaded an argument and salved over this outbreak of Scrag's.

'Ay !' pursued Scrag, not to be lightly silenced. 'I'd have 'em all cleared off—rectors, ministers, landlords, and all. Who wants 'em ?'

'Well, Scrag,' broke in Mrs. Pearse ; 'and I wunner where yo'd find me a bit o' weshing, week by week, to keep th' wolf from th' door, as the saying is, when yor clearing were done. Depend on't, they have their uses, squires and such. There's Maister Derrick's linen, as is that fine-drawed as I can charge him sixpence a week for shirts i' good money ; besides once a week up at th' Hall, to shake out them merinies as he wears next his skin, i' wayter and soapsuds, and Mrs. Finch standing over me all the time t' see as I dunnot rub 'em atwixt my honds. Shook they must

be and nought else, and a good dinner and two shillings at the end. Clearings, indeed ! I shall stick to that weshtub as long as I can scrawl.'

'H'm,' said William again, cheering up at the power of this reasoning, and yet fearful lest the force with which it was flung at Scrag might give offence.

Meanwhile Zachary stood by the doorway gazing blankly out at nothing in particular. He had not joined in the conversation ; he heard it as one hears any sound that is perpetually going on in the ears. He had his own sad and despairing thoughts to deal with, his own little knot of life to untie, as best he might ; and above all, in the midst of these prosaic conditions—this earth of the carthy, which makes time and experience so slow and colourless to the more ardent-minded—he was longing with all the strength of his heart for the wine of life, for the intoxication of the mind with that idea of beauty which is part of the Eternal Light—the Light which makes those who see it immortal.

But the prosaic was in the ascendant now, as usual—the prosaic, which causes so many eloquent words to die on the lips unspoken, and which crops the wings of young aspiration and effort so effectually, and which, in the present instance, made Zachary feel he was indeed a helpless ‘prisoner of the earth.



CHAPTER IX.

A TALK BETWEEN FRIENDS.

'Of thy life, Thomas, this compass well mark :
Not aye with full sails the high seas to beat ;
Ne by coward dread in shunning storms dark,
On shallow shores thy keel in peril freat.'

SURREY.

MR. HOWELL had arranged to dine at Hollyss Hall, two or three days after Marjorie Morrison's call upon him. The approaching visit had ceased to be distasteful, because the suspicion against Derrick, which had entered his heart like a small poisonous shaft on the occasion of the school-treat, had been entirely removed by Marjorie herself. Again, the latitude of mind which he had begun to permit, together with the stir in his blood of a great human love, produced a restlessness which drove him to

embrace every opportunity of seeing a little more life. Accordingly Mr. Howell set off cheerfully for Hollyss.

As he walked along in the pleasant afternoon air, first through the crowded streets, and then along the country ways, his mind was unusually active. Freed from the restraint of one subject for enthusiasm, it had regained its power of working with zest upon a variety of paths; and so far Howell had remained undisturbed by doubting inquiry into the groundwork of that religious faith which had been the food and enthusiasm of his life. At present it was all delight. He had the full sense of emancipation; he trod, as it were, on air; an irresistible interest in the things of earth possessed him—bud and leaf, insect and creature, cloud and sunlight, seemed with suggestion; he saw in himself the heir of a vast intellectual kingdom. And his visit to Hollyss suited with the activity of his mood; he would make the most of his moments of release from monotony.

It chimed in only naturally and pleasantly

with his enchanted happiness, that as he approached the park gates he should meet Marjorie Morrison coming along the road with a basket of butter which she had been carrying to the houses around. Saul had just arrived at the park gates, and he paused with lifted hat and radiant smile.

When Marjorie saw whither the minister was bound, she dropped a curtsy, and darted at him a look of gratitude. Now, had she been an ordinary young woman with an ordinary pair of eyes, nothing would have been plainer than the meaning of her look ; by it she acknowledged her trust that he would remember Zachary Pearse and his interests ; it was for the quarryman's sake that the eager colour of hope tinged her cheek. But Marjorie was an exquisitely beautiful creature, with an oval softness of outline in the face and tender depths of beauty in her eyes ; and when these velvety irises turned on the young man with that expressive glance, they sent the blood in a confusing rush up to his face and head, made his nerves tingle, his heart beat,

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his strength melt within him. He forgot the very existence of Zachary; all he saw was that Marjorie had blushed and smiled as her eyes fell upon him; and in the wild worship and abandonment of his feeling he longed to cast himself on the ground at her feet, and to kiss the little wooden clog that peeped under her linsey petticoat. It was only because she proceeded rapidly on her way without pause, that he restrained himself from committing some unministerial but most humanly foolish, eloquent action. As it was, he stood watching the stately figure until it was out of sight; then he went up the drive, seeing nothing, feeling nothing, but that Marjorie had blushed and smiled when she met him.

Derrick received him in the library. It was a fine old room filled with books and fitted up with every appliance for study and comfort. In accordance with the fashion of the North, although it was summer and the windows were open, a fire was blazing under the carved stone mantelpiece. There was a sense of peace and refinement, the high com-

panionship of books. Derrick himself, faultlessly dressed, with his handsome face full of welcome, was standing on the hearthrug ; he came forward to shake his friend heartily by the hand. Mr. Howell, with his hatred of anything false, would have detected the least touch of coxcombry in the figure before him ; but there was none. Derrick wore his wealth, his high-breeding, 'lightly like a flower,' and was as unconscious that his clothes were in perfect taste as he was that his frank young face was pleasant and satisfying to the eye. After the excruciating ugliness and vulgarity of Milltown, he was in himself a relief to the minister ; and, indeed, the young men were two who, give them the right conditions, were sure to get on well together, the Squire being by fate and nature harmonious, and his friend having more than the elements of discord within him. Saul felt as much drawn to this tuneable young fellow as ever he had done in the old days at Oxford. As to the rest of the surroundings, he sank down into them with the sense of relief which he was likely to

experience after three years' rigid separation from the manner of life in which he too had been born.

As soon as dinner was over, they returned to the library for coffee and conversation; and Derrick, glad of an opportunity, unfolded his schemes of reform. Saul, on the other hand, delighted to have some one rational to talk to, was ready in giving the advice for which he was asked.

'Your schemes of reform,' said he, looking at Derrick with his beneficent smile, 'on the face of them appear to be just. But then that is because they are framed without regard to the complications of society. You have been born in a certain position in life, and you form your ideas of justice from your own standpoint.'

'I don't know that I am more eaten up with the prejudices of my class than others are. I assure you that I wish to do right by my village.'

'I know that, Devonporte. But I could give you hints of lines of thought in other

men's minds that would not meet your ideas at all.'

'Explain,' said Derrick; 'fire away as long as you like.'

Then he tossed his head back against his chair, threw his arms above it, and looked at Saul with a somewhat rueful face.

'There are certain ideas,' began Howell, 'with which we are so conversant that we regard them as elementary notions accepted by everyone. We do not realize that they once appeared freshly upon the scene, and established themselves amid the opposition and outcry which is usually bestowed upon anything new. Such are the ideas concerning *the Rights of the Individual*, and *the sacredness of property*. It cost suffering, bloodshed, and confusion to establish them. Now they are so much part and parcel of our thought, that we cannot tolerate any contrary idea.'

'Ah! I see! You are going to pass on to communism, socialism, and all that sort of thing.'

‘I am. But you must not set aside this matter loftily, Devonporte, as though it had nothing whatever to do with you. It has to do with you, because it is the persistent idea of the age. I doubt whether it will permit you to ignore it.’

‘I shall not go so far as to invite it into my village, however,’ said Derrick, smiling; ‘I have no wish to entertain it here.’

‘Yet your village will not escape its touch. The age assuredly tends towards some communistic notion, some inspiration of brotherly unity. But these cannot be established save by a struggle with the reigning, time-honoured ideas.’

‘Howell, you revolutionary-minded men set down a premise like the heel of your boot. You speak with weight, like the prophet Isaiah, and skip argument. Here have I begged you for some practical advice, and in answer you shake over me the banner of revolt pure and simple.’

‘The revolutionist’s strength of conviction is better than the conservative’s power of

invective,' answered Howell, laughing. 'The best practical advice I can give you is—do not ignore the possibility of revolt, and do not set yourself to oppose the *revolt*, but to oppose the causes of it. Set yourself in accord with the age, Devonporte, and do not try to fight it single-handed.'

'But I'm by no means sure that I approve, or ever could approve, of this kind of thing. A fellow cannot side with what he abhors, with what rouses all the pugnacity of which he is capable.'

'Why should it awaken your pugnacity? Ask yourself that. The Idea of the Man for the Community certainly assumes a fresh aspect with fresh conditions, but it is by no means new. On the contrary, it is very ancient.'

'And if ancient, then probably elementary. We have left it behind. Nothing seems to me so absurd as the endeavour to force a complicated civilization back to primeval or mediæval simplicity.'

'We go back on past institutions merely to

correct ourselves. Our relapse into a primitive, less artificial state of society *in idea*, is merely a means of casting off present falseness. Then when the mind has invigorated itself by a return into simplicity, it starts forward again to some clear goal of progress.'

'H'm. The present mode of return is socialism or communism, is it not? This seems to me little short of anarchy. I don't see how society is to exist under it.'

'The present phase is initiative. If one could hold anarchy down by the throat and produce the required reforms quietly, it would be well. But I doubt whether peaceable reform is in human nature. The new socialism commends itself in its crudest, roughest form to the untaught masses. It comes first in the bitter sense of contrast between themselves and the rich; then follows the inevitable question: "Why is this inequality permitted?" Your village, Devonporte,' continued Howell, with added earnestness, 'seems safe enough from the touch of communism and nihilism; land-leagues and the "No Rent" cry seem

far enough from you ; yet depend upon it, the Spirit of the Age, "blowing where it listeth," will quicken thought even in this little corner of earth, and will set the human heart pondering and striving. You are afraid of anarchy ? Yes. The shadow of it already is cast upon the path. Yet fear nothing. This is as it were the shadow of the wings of the Lord beating the air before He descends upon the earth. The Spirit works by strange methods ; He knows no worldly caution ; He will fan the spark, maybe, in wild unscrupulous hearts ; to the individual He will prove Himself inexorable, apparently merciless. It is the Universal good which He now seeks, and the seed He sows springs up often in discord ; truly "the Lord is a Man of War" coming with "dyed garments from Bozrah," but the end of His strife is peace, a universal brotherhood, the reign of Christ on earth. Devonporte, you cannot oppose your neat plan of reform to the steady march of the Lord's thought ; will you have any real success, take courage and submit to the grand

martyrdom of facts ; modify your thought in the mould of His.'

'Your language is somewhat strange to me,' said Derrick, leaning forward in his chair and looking at the minister in rather an awed manner. 'I have never associated the thought of God with these things. I scarcely know how to explain myself. I am a Churchman, you are aware.'

'There is really no difference between Church and Dissent in the matter I have in hand. You have thought of the Lord as dwelling always in a Holy of Holies, and not as moving over the face of the earth. Most religions think in the same manner.'

'It would indeed be a novel idea to me to suppose that the voice of the unreasonable grievances of my tenants was as the voice of God.'

'No, no, Devonporte ; that is a particular application of a general principle which scarcely holds. Self-seeking and impatience come naturally from the imperfect instrument ; the leading principle, which conducts to an

end other than their own, is from the Lord.'

'How am I to believe that the Will of God is anarchy?'

'The anarchy is not an end, but a means. Has He not always laid hold of the foolishness and wickedness of men, and made them turn to His ends? A new order is ushered in by the partial overthrow of the old. It has ever been so in the history of our race. Truth or a principle triumphant, attained, rested in, then turning into falsehood and cast out to make room for the next step in Revelation. Devonporte, depend upon it there is more sacred Writ than that of the Bible; let us beware how we neglect it!'

'I am astonished to hear you talk in this way,' said Derrick, rising and leaning his arm on the mantel-shelf; 'I thought you were a minister of the Word.'

'And if so,' cried Saul, with increasing enthusiasm, 'why not of the widest of all Words of the Lord? Why not be one of the heralds, the interpreters of His message to the

age? It was not from the beginning that the sacred meaning of all life dawned upon me, Devonporte. I conscientiously enclosed myself round with the limitations of my office for long: had the print of my Lord's foot led me to any self-abnegation, any restriction—even to a monkish narrowness of life—I was more than ready to follow. I had asked only to be shown the way; but when the answer came, it showed me His footmark, as it were, everywhere on the face of the earth; I heard His voice through the uproar of battle and the strife of classes; I heard it in the tumult of opinion, even in the unsparing scorn of Atheism; above all did I read His law in the discoveries of science: His touch from henceforth for me is upon mountain and cloud, the wayside leaf and humble flower, the common faces and speech of my fellows. No breath fans my cheek, no word falls upon my ear, which is not a vibration from the mouth of the Almighty.'

The minister paused.

Derrick, who was still standing by the

mantel-shelf, looked down upon his upturned face, and marked the fire in the inscrutable eyes and the smile of enthusiasm playing round the lips; as he watched, a great reverence and affection sprang up in his heart for the man, and a desire to follow and be taught of him. Yet a lurking thought, which was scarcely a thought, was in his heart, and presently he gave expression to it.

‘I have not your intensity of religious faith, Howell; I cannot presume even to follow all you say. Yet while I am struck with the grandeur and truth of your words—a grandeur and truth to which I could never attain—it seems to me as though, while I look on them, the light goes suddenly out and leaves darkness behind. I am not used to this kind of conversation,’ he added; ‘perhaps I express myself strangely.’

Derrick had spoken out of the simple directness of his heart, and had sought his words with difficulty. When he ended his speech he turned his eyes upon his friend, and, somewhat to his surprise, saw that the glow had

faded from his face, and that a nameless shadow had passed over it ; but his next glance showed him the minister's thoughtful countenance turned with serenity upon the fire, while in his rich quiet tones he said :

‘It is the highest truth that I have spoken.’

Then there was silence between the two for several moments. The clock ticked steadily on ; the crackling of the fuel, and the soft murmur of the summer wind, alone disturbed them. When Derrick spoke again, it was with the determination to get out of the depths into which this conversation had plunged them, and bring it to bear upon practical matters.

‘Certainly,’ he said, ‘my first difficulty with my tenants has taken a shape which is extraordinary enough to match any of your theories. Do you know anything of a quarryman called Zachary Pearse ?’

At the mention of Zachary's name it seemed to the minister as though Marjorie's presence filled the room ; the memory of her smile and


blush returned upon him, and he felt a corresponding glow of the heart.

‘I know him,’ he replied; ‘he has often attended my chapel.’

‘He owes me three years’ rent. It is the worst case I have. But Pearse is not so much afflicted at my desire to see some of my errant coin as at another difference of opinion between us. It is his idea that he has a right to enter my house and walk about in it when he likes. I naturally demur. Now, how are you to meet a point of this kind?’

‘Ah!’ exclaimed the minister, looking both interested and puzzled, ‘to tell the truth, I should scarcely have expected this of Zachary. He is too much of a *gentleman* not to respect the privacy of another—too refined in nature to want to break out in the proverbial English snobism. He would never share in the national frenzy of desiring to force his way into any sacred place, or to carve his commonplace name—say on the cheek or nose of the statue of Rameses.’

‘Zachary does not regard it as intrusion;



he wishes to look at my pictures and books. He thinks he somehow has a right to enjoy my art-treasures.'

The minister looked excited.

'Devonporte!' he exclaimed, 'this is a new and interesting form of communism! This is, perhaps, the manifestation of the Divine will in your village!'

'Stop that!' cried Derrick, laughing; 'for goodness' sake don't get on it again! I can't follow you, Howell, for the life of me! Remember my inherent stupidity, and give me the practical issue without going into the cause.'

Saul flashed up at him one of his rare kindly smiles, and as he did so his heart went out in strong affection for the youth, and claimed him as his friend; while Derrick was again filled with a strange, blind, yearning enthusiasm for the minister.

'I had wanted to speak to you about Zachary,' said Howell; 'I wanted to warn you that there you had in your power a most rare soul, whose genius I am sure

exists, though I have not myself found the clue to it. Believe me, hard and fast lines of justice, commonplace ideas of personal right and property, and so on, will be found to be injustice when applied to such an one as he is!

Derrick took one or two steps backwards and forwards in the room with his brow knit thoughtfully.

‘Right must always be right, and justice again be justice,’ said he, in a low voice.

‘Yes, yes,’ replied Howell; ‘but not the manner of enforcing it. Seek out, I earnestly beg you, something of Zachary’s mind and character before you make him into the village example.’

Derrick took a few more paces along the room, and returned to the fireplace. There he rubbed his hair up, and resigned himself to a rueful look of ludicrous perplexity.

‘It appears I have started with a most complicated instance, and must make the best of my way out of it,’ said he.

The minister responded by a smile. He


would say no more, for he felt certain that the mission which Marjorie had laid upon him was successfully fulfilled.

After this conversation the two sat silent. Each wondered at the sudden and warm friendship which this meeting had, in spite of the differences of opinion and position, revived from the old college days.

It was already becoming dark, and the moon showed through one of the windows like a great lamp suspended from a star above it. Then Derrick rang for lights, and proposed that while they were being brought he should take his friend upstairs and show him the room wherein his chief art-treasures were placed. The gallery, he said, was in itself remarkable, and looked its best when the moon shone through the rows of tall arched windows, and falling upon the tapestry, the statues and portraits, gave them a spectral effect. Saul, who delighted in poetic scenes, willingly consented ; and Derrick led the way, with a small Venetian lamp swinging from his hand.

As the Squire passed through the lofty

shadowy rooms before him, delight in the ancestral splendours, the historic sense of ancient walls, gave place in the minister's mind to a strange and dreamlike feeling of mystery and fate. He walked along silently, following the figure with the single bright spot of fire in its hand, as one who is under a spell. Saul's lonely and isolated life had thrown him too much upon his own sensations, and had brought them into a somewhat abnormal condition. His mind was too sensitive to outward effects; and an unusual arrangement of colour, light or shadows, would awaken a mysterious thrill which was partly an expectation and partly a dread. He experienced it in the present moment; and it culminated when Derrick, opening a low door, took a step or two upwards and stood with his lamp in a spacious place above him. It was a lofty and majestic room flooded with pale streams of light. The white shapes of the statues had a spectral effect, and gave the idea of having been suddenly arrested in movement. This was enhanced by a trembling rustling



sound which was heard as the opening door sent a current of wind to disturb the tapestry, and by the stillness that followed when it was closed. The pale light wandered also upon the walls, and gave the same hint of ghostly life to the portraits, upon whose painted lips the smile or taunt hovered for a moment, and vanished as one gazed.

Derrick sauntered round this place carrying the lamp, and the minister followed. He had not shaken off the oppression of feeling which he had experienced; both were silent—as silent as their shadows which were thrown together upon the moonlit floor. They came to a pause almost simultaneously; the minister, lifting his head, saw that they were standing under an empty space in a dark corner of the wall, where was an empty hook. Derrick glanced up at it with a smile on his face; Saul stood looking at him inquiringly. There was a momentary hesitation in Derrick's heart; in Saul's a strange momentary beat of horror.

‘ This hook,’ said the Squire quietly, ‘ has

stood empty for a long time. One day—perhaps soon—I shall fill it up with a portrait.'

As he spoke, a flash from the lamp in his hand played for a second round the inscription on the wall: the single word 'accursed' started into light and vanished. Saul made a vain effort to read further, but Derrick turned suddenly away, and darkness again hung like a veil over the writing.

Then the Squire led his friend from the room.



CHAPTER X.

DERRICK SEES A FINE TROUT.

‘Between the acres of the rye,
With a hey and a ho, and a hey nonino.’

SHAKESPEARE.

TROUT-FISHING : it was Derrick’s delight ; the sport he began early in the season and carried on as late as was possible.

It was a fresh morning towards the end of August, and to be out between five and six suited his faultless health and unexpended vigour. The birds had, for the most part, done their singing, yet there was a twitter in the air, a wonderful stillness of human life, and a busy wakefulness of the creatures of the wood. Derrick, with his high leggings of


leather, his easy costume, his fishing-basket and tackle, strode along merrily through the dew-wet grass, followed by the faithful Bel. He knew of a place, a deep hollow in the brook, which on such a morning as this would be the haunt of fat and juicy trout; the water, which had been leaping along with a shallow murmur over stone and rocky ledge, gathered here into a silent pool. On one side was a high bank covered with ferns and bushes, and the roots of trees; on the other were ferns and bushes again, but here they formed the fringing edge of a meadow, and an angler could easily find places, as he sauntered, from whence to throw his line. Derrick came up to the spot; the grey moisture of the morning, so delightful to his young health, was already filled with flashes of sunny light that came sailing along the beads of mist from the golden rays of the eastern sky. He put his rod in order, and set Bel to the duty of watching over the basket and the rest of the tackle. Then he unwound his line, and threw; swish, it went through the air, dropping on the dark

face of the pool as lightly as the snow might fall, and leaving tiny surface ripples. Bel crumpled his brow anxiously, and kept his eyes upon the water : Derrick, patient and silent, watched the stream take his line softly in its sluggish current, and threw again and again. At last came the expected dip and pull ; he got his landing-net, and finally drew out a fine big fellow that plunged and struggled, to the joy of the sympathetic Bel, who, however, controlled his emotion as a well-trained dog should do. The fish was placed in his care—an office of which he was both proud and fearful—and the sport went on in the same order.

After half an hour's successful strolling and fishing, Derrick saw a splendid trout cosily tucked under a stone. He threw fly after fly above his very nose in vain ; the knowing old fellow had no idea either of succumbing to temptation, or of moving. Derrick began to lose patience, and to feel an unreasonable irritation against his intended victim. The water was as clear as air, and just in that spot—

which seemed almost currentless, it was so still—was overshadowed by the bent trunk of a willow-tree which projected across the stream from the top of the bank above. Derrick looked down through this reflection longingly at the sleek side of the fish : he could see every smooth stone in the bed of the stream, and the round unspeculative eye of his enemy, quite plainly. He was determined not to lose him, and he resolved to try the method of tickling. For this purpose he undid his sleeve-links, bared his arm, and knelt upon the grass, clinging with one hand to a bush. But it was written in the Book of Fate that the fish and a frying-pan should not be lightly brought together.

Derrick, curving palm and fingers into a natural cup, was dipping cautiously towards the water, when suddenly in the pool before him flashed a face; it came and lay close to the reflection of his own. By this time the sun was up, promising a warm bright day, and filling the air with light and colour. Derrick could see the face as clearly as in a




mirror; it appeared to be looking from the trunk of the willow, which concealed the body belonging to it, and there it lay before him like a magic picture; he saw the curling auburn hair, the deep pansy eyes, the sweet serious mouth, and all the tints of softness, loveliness, and womanliness that made up Marjorie's countenance. The eyes appeared to be looking straight into his own; he noticed this, though in the same moment he marked with a thrill that the reflection was being changed by the current, and that his own dark curls were made to trespass gently over the curve of her cheek ere the whole picture was broken up, only, however, to settle and reappear again. Absorbed in the excitement of his fishing, he had really not been thinking of Marjorie at all; and now that this intoxicating vision literally floated before his eyes, he gazed at it with Narcissus-like intentness, a dreamy wonder stealing into his heart. Then the face vanished as suddenly as it had come, and Derrick, dismissing the idea of water-nymphs and enchantment, sprang to his

feet. He immediately perceived the overhanging willow, and knew that Marjorie must have leaned over the trunk of the tree from the bank above to look down into the brook, and had then caught sight of him.

‘Marjorie! hi! Marjorie!’ was his prompt and very natural exclamation.

Finding that these talismanic words failed to draw the vision back, he ran along the edge of the brook until he reached a narrower part, there took a leap over, and scrambled up the bank opposite. Bel watched this proceeding with reproachful wonder, but remained true to his own duty to the fish and tackle.

Derrick reached the top of the bank somewhat breathless and dishevelled. An expanse of farm-land lay around him, and there were sounds of stirring life in the fields beyond. He stood in a pasture meadow, and at first saw no trace of Marjorie. But an old moss-grown wall stood near, and it was possible that, with her native activity, she had climbed it and vanished. Derrick sprang



over it in a moment; he found himself in a large fragrant place full of sunshine, where the corn crop stood tied in sheaves; and leaning against a stile a few yards to the right of him was Marjorie.

She wore nothing on her head; her sun-bonnet was slung upon her arm; she had the same tight-fitting blue linsey which was her ordinary garb; a book rested upon the wall before her; she leaned her head on her hand, and was absorbed in reading.

The first thing which struck Derrick was her amazing likeness to the portrait that he had discovered in the closed room. It so happened that the lady in the picture had been painted leaning with downcast eyes against a wall, in a somewhat similar attitude; and as Derrick marked afresh the stately grace of Marjorie's form, the proud yet tender reserve of her expression, and her marvellous beauty, the conviction darted into his mind that it was no idle fancy which made him link her in his thoughts with the long-dead lady of his own family.

He approached gently with uncovered head, fearful of disturbing her too suddenly.

‘Marjorie!’ said he, when he had come within a pace or two.

The girl looked up instantly, and for a second or two gazed at him with crimsoning cheeks and startled doubting eyes. Yet on a sweet summer morning, no pleasanter vision could surely have come to a village maid than this of the handsome soft-tongued young Squire. He stood before her radiant in youth and hope and health; his attitude was that of deference, and there was a diffident hesitation in his manner which appealed most subtly to her womanly sense of dignity—her need to be sued for and courted. Surely it was good to be young and to have such an one as he was to come courting; surely it was good to be young and to have such a woman as Marjorie to court!

Derrick did not feel discouraged by her look; it was not anger that stirred in cheek and eye; he came as near as he dared without giving offence. Marjorie dropped

no curtesy; I cannot say what in his eyes and manner prevented her from doing so, and waked a kind of sweet trouble in her heart—a trouble which found its answer in a delicious beat of confusion in his own.

‘I have so longed to meet you again, Marjorie, and to let you know that I am perfectly aware I behaved badly when I saw you before. I wanted to ask you to forgive me, and to let me be your friend again.’

The tone was that of gentle entreaty. Marjorie was conscious that such a tone was unusual in one whose station was so superior to her own; she felt, too, all the subtle little differences between the Squire and a man of her own rank; there was a faint scent about his garments and himself like the odours caught in passing a mignonette-bed; there was a finished gentleness in speech and grace in manner. To all this she was unaccustomed; his presence, his ways, seemed to bring a spell with them; and she gave a little sigh to relieve a feeling of oppression.

‘I will go away immediately, Marjorie, if you wish it—if you are afraid of me.’

‘Oh, Maister Derrick, I am not afraid!’ said Marjorie, with a fresh sigh.

‘I may stay?’

‘Yes,’ she answered, wishing that she could have found an excuse for saying ‘No.’

‘Tell me what book it is that you are reading,’ said he, desirous of relieving her embarrassment.

She handed it to him. It was ‘The Vicar of Wakefield.’

‘Are you fond of reading?’ asked Derrick, wondering at her choice of literature.

‘Ay! that I am! I haven’t much time, so I get up early in the morning to read a bit before my work begins.’

‘And do you always read books of this kind?’

‘I read what I can get. A—*friend* lends them to me. I read what he brings. And now I must finish this quickly, for he wants it back; he is going to take his books to town to sell them, if he can.’

Marjorie had suddenly begun to speak rapidly and fearlessly. With the mention of the book, it had flashed into her mind that this gracious young being beside her—this man who showed to her so wonderful an aspect of gentleness and deference—had been described by Zachary as ‘hard.’ Whether he was misjudged by such a description or not, with him lay the power either to do good or harm to her friend; and in the anxiety as to his welfare, all feeling of embarrassment and enchantment vanished.

When Derrick next ventured to look at her, he found that she had assumed a thoughtful aspect, and that her mind was evidently abstracted from himself. But he did not object to this at all; it gave him the opportunity of securing a firmer footing in her friendly regard.

‘It is a pity that anyone should part with books such as these.’

‘It *is* a pity; but he *must* do it,’ said Marjorie, with her decided air.

‘And shall you be unable to obtain books after this friend has sold his?’

‘We have a few at home, sir; but I’ve read all those, and Zach used to bring new books that I’d niver seen.’

‘Ah! this friend is Zachary Pearse, then?’

Marjorie blushed, and glanced up at him; she almost expected to see a hard tightening about his mouth. But he was only looking thoughtful, and she permitted her eyes to rest for a second or two, with a sense of delight, upon the pleasant face.

‘Marjorie,’ said Derrick, ‘if Zachary brings you books, he must be a great friend of yours.’

‘Yes, sir. He and I have played together ever since I can remember. And now we read together when we can, and he teaches me.’

As she spoke, Marjorie felt forlornly enough that the pleasant past was over now, and that Zachary had grown like other men.

‘Teaches you?’ said Derrick. ‘Is he wise enough and clever enough for that?’

‘He’s just wunnerful, Maister Derrick,’



said Marjorie earnestly, and discerning that the moment when she might help was coming.

‘Indeed!’

Derrick looked thoughtfully down at the grass. Bel, at this moment, unable longer to bear the suspense, appeared with an inquisitive air on the top of the wall opposite, and endeavoured to recall his master to his duty; but his master, with a caressing word, threw a stone towards him—a playful action well understood by the dog—and he retired to his trust. Marjorie marked the good feeling between the two, and took new courage therefrom.

‘You must know Zachary very well. Can you tell me anything of his character? Is he a good, honest workman?’

‘Oh, Maister Derrick! if you ask me that, what can I say? When I say he’s wunnerful—full o’ thoughts that seem to me fit to be put into a book theirsels—I say what’s surely true. But when yo ask me if he’s a good, honest workman, what mun I answer? I doubt he’s led off his work by his very

thinking. Idle he is na. I niver seed him that he were na doing something—striving and working in his own way. But in the way as other men work in—there he is na so much. I doubt whether he does the best by his quarry. I've seed him looking a'most dazed when he has said: "Lass! I *canna* chisel stones square." You might turn him out of his quarry if you thought well, Maister Derrick, and I dare say it 'ud be just, but——'

Marjorie paused.

'Well?' said Derrick gently.

'I hope yo winna be hard on Zachary, Maister Derrick.'

'I will not be hard on him, Marjorie. I hope I should not be hard upon any of my fellow-creatures,' said the Squire gravely.

Marjorie looked up now searchingly and undisguisedly, and Derrick turned his face quietly to submit to the scrutiny, which was anything but unpleasant to him.

'Well, can you decide whether I am hard or not?' he said presently, with his frank smile.

‘No, yo’re not hard. No,’ she replied deliberately, ‘it’s a mistake to think yo hard.’

‘Tell me,’ said Derrick, desirous of pursuing as impersonal a conversation as possible, and so to ward off embarrassment, ‘what is it that Zachary works at when he is pleasing himself?’

‘I’ve seen him shaping things with his knife. But most I’ve seen him studying like, and writing in a book—sums and figures they were—he calls it mathematics. I niver seed him idle and lolling in a corner smoking, or, maybe, drinking like other men when they’re playing them; he’s always at a book, or working at something with a pencil. He’s drawed me wunnerful pictures at times.’

‘Ah! He can draw, then?’

‘I dunnot know what he *cannot* do.’

Derrick smiled.

‘Zachary is fond of coming to the Hall, it appears.’

‘Ay, sir, that he is.’

‘Do other people come up to the Hall in the same manner?’

‘ Oh no, sir. Nobody wants to, as I knows on. Besides, it ’ud scarcely be seemly.’

‘ It is rather a relief to hear you say that, Marjorie. I don’t want to be unfair nor ungenerous with my things; but when I heard that Zachary came in and out as he liked, I thought perhaps it was the ordinary habit of the villagers, and I felt I could scarcely permit it.’

‘ Oh no, sir! It niver could be so. Mrs. Finch she would na allow it. But Zachary, Maister Derrick, is somehow so different to other folk, that no one treats him the same. Mrs. Finch she lets him come and go because he’s so harmless and gentle, and so fearful of making a dirt. She says it’s same as if he were i’ a church to see him i’ the gallery. And it’s not only Mrs. Finch, it’s other folk too. My feyther, he’ll scarce let a mon near the house; but Zachary, *he* may come in and out as if he belonged, and no one iver says him nay.’

‘ Well, Marjorie, I must try and make friends with Zachary.’

‘Aye, sir, if yo please ; if yo could be so kind.’

‘I have a thought, Marjorie. Do *you* ever come to the Hall?’

‘Oh no, sir, niver ! My feyther, he would na let me go for the warld.’

‘Why not ? Would he not if I asked you?’

‘That ’ud be different. Yes, I might come if yo asked.’

‘Well, then, I *do* ask you. I want you and Zachary to come together.’

Here was a new dilemma : it could not be met by an explanation. In Marjorie’s simple ideas it could only be met by a direct refusal.

‘No, sir, thank yo kindly ; it ’ud be far better—if yo’ll excuse the liberty o’ saying it —if yo asked Zachary by himself.’

There was a reserved decision in her manner which prevented the idea of any questioning, and Derrick was of course far too much of a gentleman to be either angry or to press his wishes.

‘Very well, Marjorie, I will ask him to come and spend an evening with me alone.’

The girl nodded approval.

‘Another time,’ continued Derrick, with some diffidence, ‘may I ask Mrs. Finch to invite you to spend the evening with her, and to show you the gallery and hall?’

The girl looked rather serious, but was certainly pleased.

‘I shall be fain to see the things that Zachary has told me of! I’ll come; and thank yo, Maister Derrick.’

Derrick now held his hand out and lifted his cap again. He had gained his point; his ill-conduct was atoned for; Marjorie trusted him, and their friendship was begun. She put her hand in his, and looked up frankly as he bade her adieu. Then Derrick strode away, vaulted over the wall, and disappeared.

Marjorie continued leaning against the stile, but the book no longer occupied her. The thought of Zachary was uppermost in her mind, and by far the greater part of her pleasure was for him; but it was not all upon

account, any more than her shining eyes
deepened colour were all for him.
Suddenly the sound of a brisk step roused her,
coming towards the stile across the field,
saw Abel Greenhough with his sickle in
hand. Marjorie shrank visibly a little
towards the wall. He also carried a freshly
gathered rose, and, approaching her without
speech, laid it gently in her hand. Their
fingers touched as he did so.

'Thank thee, Abe,' said the girl, in a low
voice.

Then Abel sprang over the stile and ran
across the field on the other side. Marjorie,
sighing rather quickly, turned away, and,
with her head more proudly reared than was
necessary, and a paler cheek than before,
went slowly home.



CHAPTER XI.

HOME-LIFE AT COCKSHUTHEY FARM.

'Give me a look, give me a face,
That makes simplicity a grace.'

BEN JONSON.

MARJORIE knew nothing whatever of feminine diplomacy. Clear and simple ideas of conduct had hitherto been sufficient for the exigencies of her life, and a natural directness of mind and character delivered her from any temptation to tortuous and scheming paths. But she was reticent, and of an intensely receptive nature : to 'wait upon the gods,' to take her cue from events, to anticipate nothing by her own action, were her strongest instincts ; consequently—and all the more because so much that she desired was

involved—she said nothing about her meeting with Derrick nor of his invitation to the Hall. Perhaps he would forget. If he did, no light word of hers to anyone should have the chance of reminding him ; unless it came altogether from himself, the aroma of the joy would be gone.

So she returned to her dairy, to her butter-making and cheese-pressing, in a state of excited expectation, that made her silent instead of voluble. Her invitation would not come at once, she felt sure of that, but Zachary's would ; and besides, over the whole of his fate a coming decision was undoubtedly hovering, which kept her, for his sake, in a condition of suspense. How often, during the next day or two, did she recall to memory the words she had spoken to the Squire, anxiously wondering whether she had sufficiently indicated to him the measure of Zachary's difference from other folks ! while on the occasion of the enforced sale of the books, tears of pity dropped from her eyes, which would never have been shed for herself.

Zachary no longer came in and out on his way to the Cat-ladder Quarry ; and as the days went by she began to realize that a zest had gone from her life, and that the blank which he had left behind him was a very real one. Meanwhile, in the midst of her own secret experiences, the farm-life and the home-duties went on, and the sequel to Derrick's invitation to the Hall still delayed itself. Then a certain flatness fell upon her—it was the result both of the vague expectation that lurked in her mind, and of the removal of Zachary's love and admiration ; she missed them sorely. However little she knew it, his presence had sunned her days and given colour to her life. But there was plenty of vigorous activity, and alas ! some anxiety, to keep her from dwelling too much upon girlish romances.


Marjorie's dairy was connected with the house by a short covered passage. It was a large room with a stone floor, and built against the walls were the slabs upon which the pans of milk and cream were kept. At one end of the room was a thin wire window ; over it

leaves and creepers had been permitted to grow, and through them, on this warm September morning, the light played pleasantly. Beneath was a stone trough, which had communication with a spring outside; here Marjorie cleansed her butter from the buttermilk, and the water was always allowed to trickle gently from the tap over the side, thus keeping the place moist and cool. When Marjorie worked in the dairy she wore clogs to save her feet from the wet floor; as for the cold, she preserved herself from that by constant movement.

It had been churning-morning; she had risen early to her work, and now that noon approached, it was nearly completed. Nothing remained for her to do but to cleanse the pans. By the side of the trough stood the wooden tray upon which were the half-pound rounds of butter, all clearly impressed with the foolish-looking rose, which was the Cockshuthey stamp. Marjorie had her linsey skirt carefully turned up; she wore a coarse clean apron, which, with its large lappets,

almost covered her figure ; her beautiful statuesque arms were bare, and, while snatching a moment of repose, she leaned her wrists upon her hips, curling either shapely hand outwards like a rose-coloured shell. The pink and white of her complexion were deepened by exercise and fatigue, and in this pause from labour she stretched her form and lifted her head as a relief from the movements of churning and butter-making. I scarcely know whether Marjorie looked most beautiful when her lashes, curling sleepily over her cheeks, revealed their darkness and length and allowed the clear line of the eyebrows to remain conspicuous, or when she opened her large soft eyes with their full and luminous gaze.

At this moment she turned her head to look up at the play of sunshine through the leaves ; the rebellious curls of auburn hair, caught by the spare light, shone like an aureole, and the shadows lay tenderly upon chin and lips, and upon the exquisite throat, and cheek, and little ear. Though Marjorie's



form was stately, there was nothing carved or cold about it, nor was there about her countenance; the face was delicately moulded, with a flush of living loveliness running through it; and there were serious pathetic lines about the mouth, which gave her an irresistible womanly attractiveness. She was one of those rare beings whose simplicity of nature atones for the sway they exercise, and gives them the aspect of humility in the midst of majesty.

A few seconds of rest was all that she permitted to herself; the work of arranging the butter and cleansing the pans soon occupied her. But as she moved about she turned her head now and again towards the door, as though in the expectation of hearing a step.

‘If only mother ’ud be quick with dinner, and come and finish up for me,’ she said to herself, ‘I’d just take a step down and meet John. A word might make all the difference, so as father and he would na be so set again’ each other, come dinner-time.’

But the moments ran on without her

mother appearing to relieve her, and presently she heard John come flinging in at the house-door, with that aggressive heralding of his coming which marks ill-temper even in the step. Marjorie noted the signs with a frown and a bite of the lip ; but as the pans could not be neglected, and as John took no notice of her call to him, she concluded that matters had better be left to themselves.

‘ I do hope that mother’s not forgotten to fry the ’taters,’ was her next anxious thought; ‘there’s a deal in setting the food he likes afore a lad at times—and it does no harm t’ coax ’em a bit. It makes no matter how good temper’s made, so as it ’ull only come. Men can’t get over things same as us—they’re that troubled with their own wills, poor things. Ay ! it’s a pity for ’em.’

Full of this compassion, and bent upon pouring oil on the troubled waters, Marjorie entered the front-kitchen, where the dinner was spread. The kitchen was a large pleasant apartment, full of old-fashioned oak furniture, which gave it a certain picturesque

air. The windows were thrown open, and the sunlight streamed in, bringing a scent of mignonette and fruit, and allowing the bees to buzz in and out merrily; no fire was burning in the grate—it was filled instead with branches of bay and rosemary. On the stiff oak chair by the chimney-side sat Marjorie's father, Farmer Morrison; and in and out of the room came and went Mrs. Morrison, bringing in the dishes from the back-kitchen; while John, the brother, stood leaning sulkily against the oak woodwork of the fireplace. There was a cheerful well-to-do-ness about the place, that marked the remains of an old yeomanry family—a sense of comfort, cleanliness, and order that was very pleasant; but the members of the family were all silent, and the hum of the bees and the ticking of the clock made the only voices in the room. The silence was not that of harmonious family quiet, however; it was the separate brooding in individual hearts over some sore point of dissension.

Farmer Morrison and his wife had been related before marriage; that is to say, they

were far-off cousins who could trace their descent to one pair of ancestors ; so that it was not wonderful that something of Marjorie's stateliness and beauty should be traceable in either figure. In their youth, Morrison and his wife had been the handsomest couple in the country near : and now, in his advancing years, the father was well aware that his daughter's beauty could compete successfully with that of the loveliest woman in the county—yes, and in many counties round ; and he was accordingly determined that she should never have even the chance of making an unworthy marriage. As for John, he too was a fine young fellow ; but there was a falling off, a lapse from good breed, discernible in both face and form. He was apt to slouch slightly in walking, and had not the well-knitness of his father ; and though his eyes were fine and his dark auburn hair curled crisply, the mouth and chin, which were so exquisite in Marjorie's face, were somewhat heavy and sulky in his.

When Marjorie entered, her father gave an

upward glance, and there was a perceptible softening of his stern features. She came up to him, lightly kissed him on the brow, and then relieved her mother of the dish she was carrying.

‘ There’s fresh butter-milk for thee, father. Come, John, mother’s fried the ’taters with a bit o’ dripping,’ said Marjorie, true to her principles.

‘ Oh !’ said John, coming forward in hungry alacrity, and with a change of face which betokened a momentary forgetfulness of the cause of ill-temper.

They all seated themselves, and Mrs. Morrison said the blessing in a tone which somehow suggested that she would do her duty by the Almighty, in spite of many exasperating circumstances.

‘ How’s thy butter, Marjorie ?’ asked her father, when this pious exercise was concluded.

‘ A pound or two more than last week ; and none spoiled.’

‘ That’s right, lass. Daisy’s doing well

with her milk. I allays knew I should be paid for rearing that heifer, though Christie said there were no good i' the breed. Bring a calf up on the land and it's sure to pay. And, Marjorie, thou'll want thy butter this week. Christie's selling his owd cow, and I reckon he'll be short and want some o' our brand t' make up wi'. We must oblige us neighbours, thou knows.'

'Aye, father.'

'Aye, dear, dear!' said Mrs. Morrison plaintively. 'And I forgot to tell thee, lass, as I met Mrs. Finch coming along the roadside this morning.'

Marjorie bent over her plate, angry with herself because the colour was stealing into her cheek.

'Didst, mother?'

'Aye. And she said that she set a bit o' our butter afore th' Squire last night. It were some as th' Rector's lady give her. And he were that pleased wi' it, that he asked where it come from, and he said he'd have our butter upon his table, and none other.'

Mrs. Finch she sez to me: "And well he may, Mrs. Morrison. I've been i' butter all my life, but your brand is the best as iver [tasted." "

Marjorie had waited throughout this recital to hear words which remained unspoken. When her mother finished without giving any hint of an invitation to tea, the sense of expectation which had been haunting her young heart for days and days died out. Derrick had forgotten. A lump rose in her throat, and a sense of dreary flatness came over her spirits like a fog. But already there was some disorganization in the family party, and Marjorie would not permit her own feelings to increase it; she determined that the flagging of her cheerfulness should not be visible to others. Her face, when she spoke, had a smile upon it, although the chill of disappointment gave it a shade less colour.

'Am I to make the Squire's butter, then?'

'Nay!' said John, looking up with a sullen fury in his face; 'that thou shanna, Marjorie!'

Let the Squire git his butter where he con.
It's not thy job.'

'I see no harm in just selling my butter to
the Hall, John,' said Marjorie gently.

'Thou shanna, I tell thee. It's thy
right t' eat butter theer, and not t' mak'
it.'

'John!' said his father, bringing his fist
down upon the table, 'thou'rt talking a passel
o' nonsense; and I winna have th' lassie's
head stuffed out wi' it. There's a clean pride,
and there's a dirty pride. It's a clean un as
maks us refuse to cringe to th' Squire. It's a
dirty un as maks us think we're too good t'
mak butter for him. Marjorie, thou'll save
thy half-pound, or may be thy pound, o' butter
out o' th' market lot, for th' Squire; and
thou'll tak it up to th' Hall thysel this after-
noon.'

Marjorie turned her head dutifully towards
her father; but there was a gentle determina-
tion in her air which showed that she had not
missed her share of the family will.

'I'll save the Squire a pound, father, and

lcome. But Sally shall carry it up to the
all.'

'Well, lass! that may be as thou wilt,' said
Morrison, wondering at the sudden assertion
her wishes against his own.

John, meanwhile, had been gazing from one
the other with insolent discontent in his face.
He made no secret of his disdain; whatever
the cause was, he was plainly excessively
gry at what had occurred; and since he
ould not interfere, he determined to goad the
scible temper of his father by uttering
armurs of contemptuous criticism, which,
ough incoherent, produced, as he intended,
creased exasperation. Mrs. Morrison re-
lved to avert a masculine storm by giving
y to a feminine one. She laid down her
oon and pushed her plate aside, saying, in a
ice that shook like the tremolo-stop in an
gan, and yet with a great show of self-
ntrol:

'Marjorie! I'll trouble thee for a glass of
wslip wine. It's i' the cupboard, lass.'

'Yes, mother,' said Marjorie, rising hastily

in alarm at this unlucky family sign, which she knew to be the fatal precursor of storm.

But the domestic hurricane was not destined to descend in uproar just then. At the very moment when John was about to discharge his malice in the prepared stings of a coarse speech, and when Mrs. Morrison, who had endeavoured to stem the rising flood of emotion by the fanning agitation of her handkerchief, was receiving the cordial from the hand of Marjorie, Sally, the servant, entered with the information that Mr. Christie's man had stepped round with a message.

At this news a visible shadow passed over every face, save John's. Marjorie, whose hand was usually so steady, spilt a few drops of the wine. But on John's face gleamed the evil delight of mischief; and before his stern-faced father had time to rise from his chair and go out, he shouted through the open door :

'Is that thee, Abe, lad? Walk forrard, owd brid!'

Farmer Morrison darted a look of intense

xasperation at his son ; Mrs. Morrison's motion was now too real to admit of a fan accompaniment ; and Marjorie turned hastily to the cupboard to conceal the burning spot of colour which dyed either cheek.

In answer to John's summons, a man's step was heard coming briskly across the back kitchen, and a moment afterwards Abel Greenhough stood at the door with uncovered head and bronzed face shining with pleasure. Here he hesitated, as though waiting for further invitation.

'Take a seat, lad,' cried John, swinging back in his chair and pulling a stool to the table with one hand.

Abel still hesitated.

'Walk forward, Greenhough,' said Farmer Morrison, with some self-control.

'We're at pudding, Abel, if so be as yo'll excuse and take a bit with us,' said Mrs. Morrison, fluttering between horror at his presence and the pride of hospitality.

Marjorie, turning unwillingly from the cupboard at which she had no longer an

excuse for remaining, bent her head gravely in Abel's direction without raising her eyes, and returned to her seat.

'I've had my dinner, thank yo, marm,' said Abel, seating himself with shy delight. 'I've only stepped up with a message from Christie's. He bade me say as he'd be glad of a matter of two or three pound o' yor butter. Owd Catherine, the one-horn cow, was sold yester morn, and he's short for his reg'lar customers.'

'He shall have it and welcome. Hast brought a basket, lad?'

'Aye. Lisbeth Christie mun carry it round before dark.'

'Marjorie, fetch three pound out o' market lot.'

Marjorie rose and left the room.

'At wholesale price, I reckon, Abe?'

'Well, yes; if yo'd be so kind, Maister Morrison.'

'Certinly, lad, certinly. It's nobbut right.'

'We put the extra penny on to chisel them darned landlords; there's nothing like paying

'em out i' their own fashion. They've had their day, and we mean t' have ours now,' said John, clapping Abe familiarly on the shoulder.

Abe darted a glance sideways from his keen dark eyes, but did not reply; Farmer Morrison endeavoured to cover the remark by shouting an order to Sally in the back-kitchen to bring Mr. Greenhough's basket forward. And then Marjorie appeared at the door, bearing a small wooden tray upon which the six half-pounds of butter were arranged, looking as fresh and inviting as the maid who carried them.

Abe started from his seat with his swarthy cheek flushing a deep colour, and, taking the basket from Sally's hand, approached Marjorie Morrison. Then took place one of those pictorial combinations of persons and effects, those 'arrangements' of colour and feeling, which are brought about unintentionally, apparently by the purest accident, and yet are the elements out of which the drama of life is largely composed.

Abe's action had been too sudden and natural to allow of an excuse for preventing it ; and now he stood with his basket resting upon the old-fashioned dresser against which Marjorie leaned, while with the wooden pats he began to lift the dainty rounds from the tray which she still held in her hands. There was the stately maiden with her bare white arms outspread, the creamy skin and blue veins shaming the colour of the butter, and giving it by contrast an extra shade of yellow ; and there was the outcast youth bending near, his brown hands hovering lingeringly over the tray, his dark hair and swarthy cheek now showing against a soft background of blue linsey, and now lying against a pure pale profile.

The indignant father watched in helpless wrath ; the mother threw her apron over her head to conceal the culmination of her emotion, while John sat with the cold smile of malice upon his face. Marjorie, who was guiltily conscious of every detail of the situation, grew ever paler and paler, until an unlucky

noment came when, in lifting the last round from the corner of her tray, Abe's trembling hand brushed against the dimpled arm. Then the red came back like a tide; she blushed overwhelmingly and agonizingly; the imperious rose-colour dyed even the contaminated arm itself. Abe saw it, and shaking visibly, he dropped the round twice, finally letting it tumble into the basket with the stamp downwards.

'I doubt thou's damaged that last, Greenhough,' said Farmer Morrison sternly, but with admirable self-control. 'Marjorie, carry the tray away; I canna abide a litter.'



CHAPTER XII.

BROTHERLY LOVE.

'Come ; 'tis an old custom
To weep for love.'

MIDDLETON.


MARJORIE felt that she was dismissed. She obeyed, and got back to her dairy as well as she could ; then, hardly knowing what she did, she placed the tray under the flowing water of the tap. But the chill dimness and quiet were unbearable in her present state of perturbation. She wanted the contrasting calm of sunshine, the stimulus of light, the width of earth and sky wherein to lose this intolerable consciousness of self. A state of discomposure was so foreign to her nature, that to achieve outward quiet in her

earing was not sufficient; she needed serenity leep in the springs of her being. The incomprehensible turmoil in which she found herself gave her a distress such as any disorder in her room or apparel might have given, and in her eyes the same kind of swift remedy was necessary.

She turned out of the dairy into the passage, and there, taking her sun-bonnet from the nail, remained to tie it in orderly fashion upon her head, and then went out into the garden. A sultry stillness hung around; the leaves drooped heavily from the trees, and the red and golden apples seemed to slumber amongst them; but the quiet was only Nature's pause in the midst of activity, and it had its soothing effect upon Marjorie. The trouble began to pass from her eyes as she looked upon bush and bed and laden branch; and then, out of pure habit, she took up a basket and began to collect the fallen fruit that lay scattered upon the paths. By-and-bye, however, she longed for something wider and less confined than the garden-walks, and setting her basket

upon the edge of a bed, looked round reflectingly; and then she wished for one of Zachary's books, for some lift in her thoughts which would disperse this agitation and leave her mind clear and strong as before. She was too shaken for the moment to allow memory to occupy itself with the many beautiful lines and phrases which she had learned by heart; she needed not personal effort, but guidance. Zachary had told her that beautiful and fresh thoughts were to be found easily on the heights and the hillsides, in the wide and lonely places where the sky had empire; and he had added that it was our duty to seek them for ourselves.

At the top of the garden was a small gate; it led into a lane that conducted towards a deserted quarry. The spot was quiet and unfrequented, and thither she determined to turn her steps. With collected mien, she sauntered leisurely up the path towards the gate; her hands being linked with the palms downwards and her head raised. She noticed nothing as she went but the deep blue of the



ky and the bright edge of the clouds that
y heaped upon the horizon. Nearing the
ate, she stretched her hand out to undo the
itch, when suddenly it was roughly seized
rom behind, and held in a grasp that could
ot easily be shaken off. In the unstrung
tate of her feelings, Marjorie uttered a cry,
nd turned her startled face round to en-
ounter that of her brother.

‘Whither boun’, my bonnie lassie?’

‘Nowhere special,’ faltered Marjorie, in
astonishment at this rough treatment.

‘Whither boun’, I say?’

‘I canna tell thee, John, for I scarcely
know mysen. Dost want me to do an errand
or thee? I’ll do it gladly. Loose my arm,
ad, and then——’

‘Marjorie,’ said John, with a lowering of
his whole face, ‘thou canst na come over
ne with thy soft looks and tongue. Who art
oun’ t’ meet?’

‘Meet, John? Whativer dost thou mean?’
replied Marjorie, looking at him in frank per-
plexity.

‘What *mon* art thou boun’ t’ meet, thou false lass?’

Two spots of fiery red came into the girl’s face: then she turned white, and her eyes glowed; wrenching her arm free from his grasp, she stood looking at him with an outraged sense of dignity that lent her fire.


‘Meet! *mon*!’ she repeated, in low deliberate tones. ‘How *dar’s*t thou speak to me like that! Shame on thee, lad!’

The sight of the indignation and scorn that were so new in Marjorie’s face infuriated John; it showed him that he had blundered, and in his rage he blundered more.

‘If it’s that worthless nincompoop Squire,’ he cried, ‘that thou’rt after, I’ll smash his face with my fist!’

But Marjorie, with her fingers in her ears, broke away and darted up the path and into the lane; John, for reasons best known to himself, made no effort to follow.

The girl ran on until she was certain of being alone; the idea of escaping from home and from its ever-watchful eyes was upper-




most; all the turmoil had returned with redoubled force; nay! an agony of emotion now possessed her which was too great to be struggled against, and she could only fly from observation until it should be spent. Getting out of the lane, she passed into a rough and upward path that led to the deserted quarry; here the banks on either side were overgrown with brambles and ferns, and the deep cart-ruts were filled with weeds. Frequent rains had washed the stones of the road loose, but she stumbled on over them, glad of the physical effort, and of the breeze that fanned her cheek.

The quarry was a great grey, rocky cup scooped in the side of the hill—a lonely place that had gathered stillness into itself; far advanced within was a smooth ledge, above which the walls had decked themselves with fern and moss. Here the girl flung herself full-length, finding in the severe bed a suitable place in which to spend her passion. She lay with her round limbs and bosom pressed against the rock, and her arms hiding

the sights and sounds of earth and sky from eyes and ears. There was a storm of feeling within that was new to her—a sense of outrage which had its origin not in the rough words of her brother so much as in the scene in the kitchen at home. John's rudeness had but overthrown her ill-poised serenity, shaken her self-reticence, and let out from a thousand sluice-gates the secret force of irresistible emotion. It came upon her, as all new and strong emotion does to a young creature, like a surprise—almost a terror. Amid the tears and hot blushes which suffused her cheeks (she scarcely knew why) was a feeling of intolerable anger at the thought of the glances that had scorched her in the kitchen, and the rough handling by her brother that had followed. Beneath all was a great yearning, and pity, and longing; these possessed her like a joy, and yet they were the heaviest occasion for despair.

The first sign of her passion abating was that she became conscious of the stillness around; it seemed to lay the finger of



reproof upon her, and without raising her head she ceased her sobs, and allowed the sense of nature's peace to control her. Then, lifting herself from her recumbent posture she seated herself upon the stone, looking, amid the overhanging ferns and weeds, like some exquisite nymph of the woods. The emotion to which she had given way struck Marjorie almost as a disaster. A passionate flood of tears is an eloquent exponent of the heart; it cannot be ignored in a reticent nature, in one of those delicately poised minds wherein emotion is equivalent to self-betrayal and to acknowledge any agitation is to give it a sanction. Marjorie could not repair what had happened; but she had sufficient strength left to set aside the thoughts that had stirred this agony, and to turn her attention to a few practical matters, which also had got awry, and for which she fancied a remedy lay in herself.

The taunts which John had uttered against the Squire touched unpleasantly upon her own disappointment; but the important part of this lay in the fact that, with her, the Squire

had also probably forgotten his promise concerning Zachary ; and unless the minister were more successful than she had been, the lad would be left to struggle helplessly with his difficulties and troubles. As for herself, she crushed with an effort of will the sense of expectation and fresh possibilities which the Squire's attentions had awakened, and set to work to see if there were no point where a little self-blame would be salutary. In the first place, the attitude which she had assumed was open to criticism ; there had been a curtailment of the natural distance which difference of rank created between them ; she had neglected, for instance, the invariable curtesy, and had permitted to herself too great a freedom and ease of speech. His forgetfulness insinuated into her mind a doubt as to his character. A promise, however small, was a serious obligation to Marjorie—if he still remembered he should be forgiven all ; but even then she resolved that no occasion should tempt her to trespass beyond the limits of respectful deference again. As to the rest, the

duties and calls of home-life lay before her; and in the safety of the old monotonous paths could she not hide away that *other*?

While engrossed in her thoughts, Marjorie had not perceived the gathering of thunder-clouds. The heavens had been blue and sultry before; now dark majestic heaps frowned above her, while from the horizon streamed the witch-like lightning clouds with their pale and lurid hue; then a tongue of fire darted out, followed by an instantaneous crash.

Marjorie started from her seat. The storm would not have seemed so sudden had she been noticing more; but now it appeared to her that this overcasting of a sunny day, this vehement disorder about her, answered in some subtle manner to the inward turmoil which she had indulged while she condemned it. As she saw the storm sweeping across the sky and descending upon the quiet farm country in hurricane and rain, she shrank back, cowering against the rocks, and stupidly watching the torrent that dashed along the path over which she had lately stepped dryshod.

A selfish inducement would have had no power to draw her from the shelter ; but across the mouth of the quarry appeared a quaint and dripping little figure. This was a thinly clad girl, with a slight form, who battled against the wind, struggling at the same time with the weight of a basket that was too heavy for her frame. Marjorie's ready sympathy was excited in a moment : she forgot herself, and, running out into the storm, seized the basket in one hand, and drew this weak creature to the shelter of her larger form with the other.

‘Lavvy Pearse!’ she cried, ‘what art thou doing out i’ the rain ? Run with me to the farm, and thou shalt na go back this night !’



CHAPTER XIII.

FRIENDLY COUNSEL.

'The face of all the world is changed, I think,
Since first I heard the footsteps of thy soul
Move still, oh, still beside me !'

E. BARRETT BROWNING.

THAVINIA PEARSE was drenched to the skin, and Marjorie herself was very wet; it was evident to Mrs. Morrison that measures must be resorted to. That good lady had arranged to spend the afternoon in a state of tearful collapse; and to aid this process, she had put on her second-best black silk dress, and a cap with mauve ribbons, and, retiring to the parlour, had brought out her Bible and Jeremy Taylor's 'Holy Living and Dying,' and seated

herself stiffly on the best armchair with the books disposed on a table near her. But when Sally's exclamations from the back-kitchen warned her that an occasion for activity had arisen, the good creature forgot her grievances, and pushing Jeremy aside, rushed to the scene, silk garment and all. There she beheld the two dripping girls clinging together in the porch, afraid to enter lest they should damage the spotless whiteness of Sally's floor. An exigency of this sort Mrs. Morrison loved, as one loves the thing that calls out the best of one's nature. In less time than Lavinia could count, she found herself whirled to a large and sweet-smelling apartment; and then again, before she had time to collect her breath and her wits, she found herself seated in a cosy chair by a blazing fire, wrapped in garments that were dry and warm but infinitely too large for her, with her feet in a pan of hot water and her two hands clutching a basin of hot gruel. Marjorie stood on the hearth near her, the ruined sun-bonnet dolefully smoking

on the guard, and all her beautiful auburn hair shaken out in multitudinous waves to her knees for the purpose of drying. Mrs. Morrison was bustling about the room, voluble, motherly, and excited.

To Lavinia, when she had sufficiently recovered herself to think at all, the prominent idea was that of her own garments dripping miserably in some spot of this magically clean house, and spreading dirt and damp from themselves to the floor. She gave a little agonized start in her chair, and exclaimed :

‘ Oh, Marjorie ! my clothes ! ’

‘ What is it, lass ? ’ said Marjorie, looking at her with bewitching gentleness from the wonderful veil of hair. ‘ Thy clothes shall all be dried. They winna spoil, I reckon.’

‘ It isn’t that, Marjorie. I’m thinking,’ said Lavinia, her anxious blue eyes strained and open, ‘ how they’ll be making a dirt somewhere i’ yor beautiful house.’

‘ Niver yo mind such a thing,’ said Mrs.

Morrison decidedly. 'Sally 'ull mop up i' no time, child. Now git that gruel down!'

'Ay! Mrs. Morrison! how iver con I eat such a basin as this?'

'Thou mun do it, child. How far didst say thou hadst travelled to-day?'

'My mother sent me down to Old Scrag's to get a cabbage or two as Abel had promised us. My father he did na want me to go; but mother said it was nought to speak on. And then it come to my head that Abel told me to call some day at Christie's Farm and he'd let me have a store o' damaged apples. It were that as brought me round by th' quarries. Ay! the basket were some weight!'

'Feel it, mother,' said Marjorie pitifully, lifting the basket an inch or two from the floor.

'It's not a fit weight for thee,' said Mrs. Morrison indignantly. 'Abel should na have loaded thee like this.'

'He wanted to carry it hissel', but I would na let him,' said Lavinia.

'Marjorie!' cried Mrs. Morrison, with

motherly anxiety, 'keep thy hair out o' dust ; thou'rt sweeping it all upon th' floor. And thou to stand staring i' the quarry till the roads were all streams instead of coming home at the first peal ! Lift thy foot again, child, and let me make sure that it's warm.'

'But, mother,' said Marjorie, obeying, 'if I hadn't waited, who'd have brought Lavinia to the farm ?'

'True, child. It's all in the way of Providence, and we must be thankful,' said Mrs. Morrison, with a fragmentary recollection of what she had been reading in the early part of the afternoon.

Then gradually the bustle subsided, and Lavinia, sinking more and more into the downy cushions of her chair, began to think of the haven that the mariner reaches after the whirlwind and storm. Mrs. Morrison's arrangement was, that the two girls were to remain in their bedroom, and after tea had been sent to them, they were to get into the warm bed, and go early to sleep. These measures she considered necessary for Lavinia's

chilled and over-strained body ; as for Marjorie, they were precautionary. As soon as she had made known her wishes, she went out, closing the door softly behind her, and left them to themselves.

The added rest even from kind attentions was most grateful to Lavinia. She had no inclination to speak, but sat with her small feet upon the footstool, with which she had been provided, and her small hands folded upon her knee, looking, in her high chair and large clothes, like a child dressed up to play woman. Marjorie, sitting opposite in a similar chair, her hair shrouding her like a mantle, leant back against the cushions with the languor which follows upon unwonted emotion. Under any other circumstances she would certainly have rebelled against her mother's prescriptions ; but to-night she was thankful for the unusual rest and warmth, and inexpressibly glad to be away from the family party, and alone with Lavinia.

A few short questions sufficed to show that Zachary had been tolerably successful with

the sale of his books, and had sent a first instalment of rent to the Squire, but had otherwise heard and seen nothing of him.

After this, a silence fell ; it was occupied by Marjorie in sad thought, and by Lavinia in the pure enjoyment of rest. She looked round upon the large and comfortable bedroom ; upon the four-post bed with its patchwork counterpane ; on the old-fashioned chest of drawers, with the brass handles shining in the firelight ; on the gaily painted screen that stood between them and the door ; on the shelves and presses, the hooks where a duplicate of Marjorie's working linsey hung ; and lastly, upon a small table that stood beneath a recess in the wall which had been fitted up with book-shelves. On the high mantel-shelf over her head were two brass candlesticks and a pair of china bowls, filled, no doubt, with the sweet herbs whose scent wandered powerfully over the chamber ; and near the long lattice-work window were crimson curtains of rough baize, ready to be drawn when the night closed in. Lavinia sank more and more


into a delicious sense of rest and peace, and Marjorie remained silent until her mother and Sally entered again to draw the curtains and give them their tea, and leave them afterwards to a solitude that was only to be broken by morning.

Marjorie was the first to speak ; her eyes had fallen upon the thin pair of hands folded upon Lavinia's knee, and then they wandered over the whole elfin figure and rested upon the wise and gentle face. Instantly, the beautiful look of pity spread over her countenance.

'How small and white thy fingers are, Lavvy! How different from mine,' she added, looking with almost a sense of reproach at her own comely hand.

'That's just what Abel said to-day,' cried Lavinia, struck with the coincidence and unimpressed by the reference to herself. 'It's wonderful how kind folks are, to be sure!'

'Is Abel kind?' asked Marjorie, holding the veil of hair between herself and the fire.



‘Aye. But thou knows it, Marjorie. There’s no kinder mon atwixt this and Milltown.’

‘Dost see much of him?’

‘Zach does; and in a sort o’ way I do too. In an evening Zach stays a deal at th’ quarry, and I bring him a book there after my tea. He likes the quiet, thou knows; and Abe is sure to be there too. They niver drive me off. Abe allays makes me a seat with his coat on a stone, and I bring my knitting, and then they read a bit and talk wonderful. I just listen as still as a mouse.’

‘Isn’t it nice, Lavvy?’ asked Marjorie wistfully.

‘It’s a bit o’ a change. I don’t know as all they say ’ull fit very well into everyday work. It’s like the “Pilgrim’s Progress” for that. We niver *do* start off from us homes and us village, but the pretence that we do helps us on a bit. I’m fond o’ thinking that it’s “the Hill of Difficulty” when there’s the floor to scour or the market things to be fetched.’

‘But is it a tale that they’re telling one


another ?' asked Marjorie, her eyes large with curiosity.

'Oh no ; not that. I niver can understand what Zach aims at, but I catch what Abe says.'

'What is it ?'

'He's allays for helping the weary and weak. He wants th' poor not to be poor any more. He says there's a time coming when no one 'ull be wretched and starved ; and when the weak winna be beat down with over-much work ; and then he nods and smiles at me, till I feel quite strong-like and able. But I don't know as th' talk makes much difference really ; I go back t' find mother worrited with the work, and my dad tired and sick, same as if Abe had niver said it were all to come to an end. Still, thou knows, it helps, same as the "Pilgrim's Progress."'

'I wonder,' said Marjorie, in a low voice, 'how thou canst do all that thou hast to do, Lav. What time must thou be at the mill ?'



‘At six. But it’s no worse than thee, lass.’

‘Aye! But I haven’t t’ walk to my work.’

‘But thou dost na know how still and beautiful it is upon the hillside at half-past five i’ the morn. Ay! I do love the old Clough Mill! It seems as if it had growed out of the valley, as if the cleft i’ the hills had been made o’ purpose to put it in. I stand sometimes under the archway when I’m a bit early, and watch the girls coming down th’ lane from the hills. How th’ road twists and turns, to be sure! It’ll be a wonder howiver it finds it way to the mill at last. And the mist o’ the morn is that pretty in the sunshine. Ay! I do love the old Clough Mill!’

‘I’m wondering, Lavvy, how thou finds time to larn thy lesson for the Sunday class, too.’

‘I can tell thee how I do that last, Marjorie. Thou knows I’m a piecer; and my mule stands i’ the corner of the room with a window at the side. And I lay my

Bible open on the sill by my oil-can, and then I walk after my jenny to tie the broken threads, and always as I come near the window, I catch a sight o' my book. I've learned a whole chapter that way i' the week; and thou canst na tell, Marjorie, how beautiful it were this last week to begin on a Monday, "Let not your heart be troubled." It were better even than Abel's talk. Then, too, there's Harriet Jackson—she has na a window, but she wants t' larn the chapter same as I; so we contrive t' meet i' the middle o' our walk, and I whisper th' text to her, and she says she does middling well at th' schoo'.'

'Yes,' said Marjorie thoughtfully; 'it's right, it's beautiful. It's same as Zach once said to me. He called it "Labora et ora," and he telled me that meant "Labour and pray." He said there were nought like it upon earth, save love.'

There was a silence between them; that silence which means separate thought upon one subject. Marjorie got up once to toss an extra log upon the fire.

‘Dost want t’ go to bed, Lavvy? Thou’rt surely tired.’

‘Nay. Seems like a waste to go to sleep in this beautiful quiet. I’d like to stop up a bit just to feel it.’

Marjorie glanced at her thoughtfully, opened her mouth to speak, and closed it again without uttering any word. Then she leaned forward, looking at the flight of sparks up the chimney and the dance of the flame upon the log. A glow was upon her cheek; the little face opposite was wonderfully gentle and true; should she venture to unburden her heart in some measure, and see what the wise little creature would say?

‘Lavvy,’ she said presently, in a voice that seemed almost to fear itself, ‘tell me, hast iver had a lover?’

Lavinia smiled; the idea of a lover for herself was too humorous to be met with gravity.

‘Nay, lass! What should *I* do with a lover?’

‘Surely,’ said Marjorie, disappointed, ‘thou

canst tell me a little ; thou knows something of it. Thou'rt older than me.'


'Harriet Jackson's sister Nancy had one,' said Lavvy, racking her brains in anxiety to please.

'Well,' said Marjorie eagerly, 'Nancy was wed last year. Dost know how he come to her—how he began ?'

'Oh !' said Lavvy, brightening, 'yes, I do know that. Tom Walker, he used t' manage to pass by Nancy ivery Sunday when she come out of th' schoo' ; and he used t' nod at her sideways a-thisns,' said Lavvy, nodding her small head knowingly at the innocent bedpost ; 'and Zach, he says to me, "Tom's courting."'

'Well,' said Marjorie, opening her eyes, 'there must have been something more than that.'

'Not as I know on. They was cried i' church after that ; and Harriet said Tom used t' come in of a Sunday and sit upon th' chair behind the door ; and Mrs. Jackson, she give him a cake wi' a gosberry in it.'



‘Wouldst be courted like *that*?’ said Marjorie, proud and indignant.

‘Nay. It’s soft work at best, I reckon. I’d rayther be sitting with Abe and Zach i’ the quarry, listening to talk.’

‘Lavvy,’ said Marjorie, with her voice trembling and her face in a glow, ‘I had a dream lately, and I’d like to tell it thee if thou’ll listen.’

‘Aye! I’ll listen, Marjorie. Go on,’ said Lavvy, all eyes and eagerness.

‘I dreamt—thou knows it’s a dream?’

‘Aye! it’s a dream.’

‘I dreamt I were walking i’ a still place—like as it might be evening on a grey day, when there’s no red i’ the sky—and I thought all on a sudden there come a glow like gold from the west, wonderful shiny, and misty, and strange; and my heart began t’ beat — ay, I canna tell thee how!—Lavvy!’

‘Aye, Marjorie?’

‘Thou’rt sure thou knows it’s a dream?’

‘Aye, I know it’s a dream! “Misty and

strange," and thy "heart began to beat."
Go on, lass.'

'And out of the glow there stepped th'
figure of a mon. He had eyes that looked
through to my heart, and a wind and a music
went with him; and he said no word, but he
laid i' my hand a flower like a star, and then
he went by and the glow passed away; but
my heart were still as a pool when the sun
lies low i' the heavens.'

'Ay, Marjorie! it's like Revelations! Go
on!'

'Lavvy, wilt *swear* thou knows it's a
dream?'

'I'll swear it's a dream! Why, lass, what-
iver makes thee think I could suppose it were
real for? Is na there no more?'

'Aye, there's some more.'

'Go on, do thee, then.'

Marjorie rose and stood by the fire, tossing
her hair back with one hand and leaning the
other on the mantel-shelf.

'It were grey and quiet again, and I had
my knitting in my hand. My flower I'd

thrust i' my bosom. And then a youth came riding by on a horse : he were grand t' look on, with the grace of a prince, and the gentleness of a maid, and a sweet scent o' flowers about him, and beautiful clothes ; and he leaped from his horse and came to my side, and his words were soft and dear to my ears. I could have listened for iver. And a wonder came into my heart and into my head, like one between sleeping and waking, and I wished for nothing so much as to wander by his side i' the grey dim land foriver. But I thought, as he left me, a red glow came in the sky and swept over the land like a veil, and a sound like an organ went with it, and a wind ; and ~~he~~ came in the light and the music, the mon wi' the wonderful eyes, and my heart waked out of its sleep, and stirred like a torrent as is bursting its bonds ; and he placed i' my hand a red rose and went by, and in the rose was a thorn.'

Marjorie paused : her voice had risen as her words progressed, and now she involuntarily caught her hand to her side and drew

a deep breath. Lavinia looked at her with eyes full of awe.

‘Marjorie, whatever does it mean? Is it courting they were?’

‘Does it sound like courting?’

‘Aye, it does,’ said Lavvy dubiously; ‘as much like courting as Abel’s talk is like real life.’

‘And if it were courting, which wouldst thou take?’

‘Oh, I’d take him as brought the flowers.’

‘*Wouldst?* But him as had the beautiful clothes was so easy to be with, his tongue was so soft and pleasant.’

‘Aye, but flowers is better than words!’

‘Are they, Lavvy? The rose had a thorn.’

‘Thou canst na have roses without thorns, seeminkly; and it’s better to be wide awake, and thy heart i’ a stir, than sleepy and that. Abel ’ud say so. Seems like as if t’ other had bewitched thee.’

‘Dost think it?’

‘Aye, I think it.’

‘Lavvy, it’s only a dream, and there’s no courting i’ the matter ; but——’

She turned suddenly from the fire, and throwing her head back, stretched her arms above it with a look of passion and pity and yearning in her face, and an abandonment of feeling in her voice. She had forgotten the presence of Lavinia.

‘But if it were so ! Oh, I could love ! Oh, I could be true ! Aye ! I could trail my heart under his foot ! Lord help me ! How deep I could love !’

Then she let her arms fall again by her side, and turning back to the fire wearily, said in a grave altered tone to Lavinia :

‘Come, lass. Thou’dst better get into bed : we’ve talked enough nonsense to-night.’

‘It is na nonsense, I’m thinking. Marjorie, I’ll just say my prayers, and then.’



CHAPTER XIV.

ABEL GREENHOUGH.

‘The face which character wears to me is self-sufficiency.’

EMERSON.

DERRICK had not forgotten his promises to Marjorie, however much appearances were against him. But he himself had been encountering bitter passages.

The second meeting with Marjorie, on the morning of his trout-fishing, had confirmed his suspicion that he had fallen in love at first sight. Hitherto his idea of the passion of love had been, that it was a kind of sickness which he might perhaps escape ; but now he found how supreme was the emotion which

a beautiful and perfectly modest woman might excite in the heart of a man. In the midst of the ensuing struggle between his affections and pride of position, he was forced to recognise that it was good for him to love one so eminently worthy of love as Marjorie, even though she were of inferior station. His passion elevated him, and stirred all that was noble in thought and purpose; and while in one moment he told himself that it was impossible for a Devonporte of Hollyss to marry below his rank, in the next he declared that the heart which had once been given to Marjorie could never be contented by marriage with another. The end of it was, that one day when he was riding out in the sweet September sun, he brought his struggle to a termination, by taking his hat from his head and vowing, with his joyous face lifted to the skies, that Marjorie Morrison, and none other, should become the wife of the Squire of Hollyss. Then something like peace came to him, and calling to his aid the natural resolution of character which he possessed, he

began to consider how best he could combat the difficulties that lay in his path. To begin with, though he had all the boldness of a lover, he had also the humility, and he was by no means certain how Marjorie would receive his suit. There was not much doubt about her parents; their ambition would probably be satisfied in seeing their daughter 'clothed in purple and fine linen.' But he would not have her sold to him for gold; he would win her heart by slow degrees, and surprise her one day into some sweet confession of love. As he thought of the possible termination to his dream of happiness, his hand involuntarily tightened on the rein, and he brought his horse to a standstill. Then he sat looking over the same plain that Marjorie had looked over on the fishing morning, with just such a glow of proud anticipation in his face as she had worn.

The other considerations that perplexed him were those consequent upon the difference in their positions in life. It does not always turn out happily when a man puts into prac-

tice the beautiful theory of the union of class with class. Marjorie was all the sweeter to him because she was just such a woman as God had made her, and had escaped the trimming up and paring down of fashion and society ; he contemplated now transplanting her into his own position, but by no stretch of imagination could he picture her flourishing there. If he succeeded in what he desired, some little conformity to the usages of the world would be necessary for her happiness, some modification from the linsey gown and from the north-country vernacular which was so charming and musical in her present position. But how was this to be arrived at in a manner painless to her ?

It was not in Derrick's nature to be selfish in passion ; the sweetness of his disposition made him respond to deeper notes ; and while he desired intensely to possess Marjorie, he resolved that no rash action of his should risk her future peace of mind ; he could not bear to think of her pining in secret, like the bride of the Lord of Burleigh, and he made

up his mind to proceed cautiously, to find some means of accustoming her to his surroundings, to educate her unconsciously, and above all, to establish himself firmly in her friendship. He was somewhat astonished to find what modifications in his pride of class and prejudices the face of a beautiful woman had made in the course of a few weeks; yet he could not believe that—seeing what Marjorie was—any future moment would come which should have the power to make him regret his resolve. She did not lose either in dignity or intelligence, and certainly not in beauty, when he compared her with any feminine acquaintance of his own class.

As he rode on through the fragrant lane between the fields of newly cropped corn, he thought of the contrast between Marjorie as he knew her now and certain audacious and extravagantly dressed young ladies who had drawn him into ballroom flirtations of yore, and his heart laughed within him to think how fresh and unspoiled an Eve had come to make his earth a Paradise, and to give him

sensations as new, as thrilling, and as complete as those which came to the first man. It was out of the question, he considered, that, whatever changes and modifications education and so on might make in Marjorie, she should ever be forced to assume such garments as the aforesaid young ladies wore: the flounces and furbelows, the excrescences here, and the ties-back there—all of which he had accepted easily before—he could not tolerate in connection with Marjorie. Her beauty had already educated his eye and purified his taste; some garb must be invented for her such as he had seen in old pictures—she should create her own dress, as it were. He could not imagine this perfect creature, whose figure was supplied by the beautiful healthful movements required in her farm-life, whose complexion glowed with fresh air and exercise, and whose easy graceful tread showed the unhampering nature of her garments, undergoing any of the crucifixions of fashion, any more than he could imagine that fine young farmer whom he descried in the

field yonder, dressed up in a tight cravat and an evening coat.

He pulled up his horse as he thought this, and watched the figure which had just attracted his attention. The gate, by which he had now come to a standstill, opened on to a barley-field, and there were several labourers at work cutting the corn. The sunshine fell sleepily upon the heads of barley ; there was no wind ; they stood motionless in the light : each little spear-head glistening defiantly in the sun. There was no noise save the far-off cawing of the rooks, the cut of the sickles through the crop, and the fall of the weighted blades to the ground. The man whom Derrick was watching had his back to the gate. His bare brown arm swung the sickle with regular movement through the corn ; his blue shirt was loose at the throat, his straw hat was pushed back on his head, and in the coloured handkerchief about his waist the sharpening stone was thrust.

‘ What a splendid specimen ! ’ said Derrick to himself, after a long survey. ‘ Now if that

fellow would always keep his back turned towards one, what pleasant illusions one could have as to the development of the race! What a pastoral poem he makes in himself! But let him show his face, and there will be a prompt disenchantment. A being devoted to bacon and beer, no doubt. Hi!’

The man turned in a moment, and Derrick felt that he would have given anything if that last single syllable had remained unpronounced; for in the dark crisp curls, the marked eyebrows, the firm features and hawk eye, he recognised the man who had appeared before him as Marjorie’s champion, and whose existence he had almost forgotten.

Abel Greenhough, with his sickle on his arm, approached Derrick slowly in answer to his call. Derrick mastered his features, but could not prevent a shade of pallor from stealing over his cheek. Neither knew of the other’s encounter with Marjorie on the same morning a few days previously; yet she was the prominent idea in the mind of both.

Derrick had a gentle and reasonable character; he overcame the ungenerous inclination to speak with hauteur. Abel now stood close by the horse in an attitude that was perfectly independent, yet respectful—the respect being of a kind that one fellow-creature naturally accords to another.

‘Is Mr. Christie about?’ asked Derrick.

‘Not in the fields, sir; he’s at the barns.’

‘You have carried a good deal of corn,’ said Derrick, determined to pursue the conversation now that the meeting had occurred.

‘Yes. If the weather keeps like this we shall have had the best harvest for many a year.’

‘Perhaps you are Christie’s foreman?’

‘Yes, I am.’

‘I do not know your name?’

‘Abel Greenhough.’

‘Ah! Christie’s farm is well managed, and I am glad to make acquaintance with his foreman,’ said Derrick, trying the effect of a little stately praise.

He glanced at the hawk eyes, which, in the intensity of their gaze, disconcerted him in the same way that Zachary's had done. He truly wished to be friends with the man; and he deplored that his own folly had made an awkward beginning for him. Greenhough had been in the right and he in the wrong. He flashed a friendly smile at him. Abel acknowledged these overtures with nonchalant, but not insolent gravity, and a touch of the sat.

'Are you wishing to see Mr. Christie at once? I could send one of the men,' said he, looking round rather regretfully at the idea of taking one of them off his work.

'No, no! I will ride round to the barns presently. It is about a case of trespassing that I wish to speak to him.'

Abel's mouth tightened.

'One of my keepers complains that a labourer of Christie's has made a habit of passing every day once or twice over the edge of the Grouse Moor, and on through Low Wood where the pheasants *used to be* preserved.

He says that in consequence of the regular way in which this man has adopted the path, people have been encouraged to follow him, as it makes a convenient short cut between Moorfield and Hollyss; this has gone on for a couple of years, consequently the birds have been so disturbed, that my shooting is practically spoiled for the present. Now I object to the Grouse Moor being made a thoroughfare; but it is out of the question that I can allow Low Wood to be trespassed upon. You see this, Greenhough ?'

'I see what you wish well enough.'

'As you are foreman, you will probably have the authority to prevent it,' said Derrick, wishing that the keen eyes would betray some other sign than that of watchfulness.

'It will be Horrocks, the new keeper, who has made complaints,' remarked Abel, in a tone of quiet conviction.

'Yes, yes,' said Derrick curtly; 'but that is no matter. I agree with him entirely;

these orders are from myself; they express my own wish and intention.'

'Th' shooting's spoilt, is it?'

'I fear that it is, for the present. We must see what we can do next year. But I have some well-grounded suspicion that what birds are left have been now and again trapped and killed.'

Derrick, sitting upon his horse, had assumed unconsciously the air of calm authority which is natural to one of the ruling class. The touch of awkwardness had passed off; he looked down easily—the picture of a high-bred youth—upon Abel Greenhough, with scarcely a doubt in his mind that, whatever opinion as to himself might be hidden behind the remarkable face, his present wishes were being attended to with quiet respect.

'The birds have been trapped, have they? By whom?'

'How should I know?' said Derrick.

'By those whose property they have injured, I should say. Pheasants 'ull make

rare havoc i' a barley-field. What do you do with a rat when it breaks into your larder ?

Derrick looked at Abel now in frowning surprise. What did the man mean ?

'Christie and my other farmers, of course, have compensation for any damage my birds may do to the corn,' said he.

'Aye. But what compensation do the people get for the destruction o' so much corn, the wasting o' so many bits o' land here and there ? Yo'll know the bearing o' that question, being a scholar. And as to the trespassing—I doubt yo'll have some difficulty about it,' continued Abel calmly, while, unslinging his sickle, he used it on the head of a nettle ; 'but yo've come to the right mon. I am the labourer that Horrocks has noticed.'

'I had no idea of that, Greenhough,' said Derrick, making up his mind to cut short a conversation which he saw was likely to prove a combat ; 'you will no doubt respect what I have said, and take some other course.'

He jerked his reins, and would have set his horse in motion. His finely cut face looked cold and proud.

‘Stay, Maister Derrick,’ said Greenhough, with sudden energy; ‘the path over the moor—that grand bit o’ wild uncultivated land—and through the Low Wood, is the nearest way to my work. I live at Ouzel Hole in Moorfield, and I must walk a mile round if I’ll get to Christie’s farm another road. But that’s not saying so much. It ’ud be like putting my own convenience against yors. But the path through the Low Wood and over the Grouse Moor is the nearest way for a score o’ tired labourers home again; it ’ud take half an hour off their wage and sleep to go the round; but strong men are strong men, and might put up wi’ it to suit yor convenience. But that same path is the nearest road for a score or two o’ young lassies on their way to the Clough Mill morn and night, and it ’ud be an ill thing t’ lay the burden o’ work any heavier on weak bits o’ things like them. I found out the path for

'em. Yor shooting may be spoiled, but the harvest's better, and over a hundred labouring folk are eased by that path through the pheasant preserves.'

Derrick had rarely felt as angry as he did at that moment. He saw his own rights quietly ignored as immaterial, and discerned that he was covertly represented as a selfish 'cumberer of the ground.' It was impossible to discuss his rights or to explain his desire of being an exemplary squire to his assailant; he felt an indignation such as men experience when they are unjustly attacked, and the implied hint that his wishes would not be attended to, sent his blood up.

'Am I to understand by this extraordinary speech that you refuse to comply with my wishes?' asked Derrick hotly, and yet with a lurking astonishment at himself for using a phraseology with which he would have addressed one of his own class.

'I've not considered it yet. The probability is that I *do* refuse,' returned Abel coolly. 'What I'm trying to point out to

yo is the harm yor wishes 'ud do to others, were they complied with.'

Derrick took a cigar out, and letting the reins fall on his horse's neck, proceeded deliberately to light it. The dispute was arriving at a point where it was necessary for him to keep calm; hitherto—with the exception of Zachary's incoherent assumptions, which had sounded like the ravings of a poet rather than the grievances of a quarryman—he had been treated, even in discussion, with the deference due to his position; it had been easy and pleasant to yield a point now and then with the graceful generosity which was natural to him; it had even flattered his sense of power to be worried by petitions. But this man stood before him like an equal, and gave him not an inch of superior standpoint.

'You cannot suppose that I shall receive instructions as to my actions from the tenants or labourers on my estate?' said Derrick, when he had discharged one little puff of smoke.

‘And who’d be so likely to give yo the right instruction as the people that ‘ull suffer by yor mistakes?’

‘You are aware that I have the law on my side?’ continued Derrick, ignoring the question.

‘Oh, I make no doubt yo’ve the law o’ yor side. Who made the law but the men whose interest it was t’ shut up land and keep th’ game for their sport?’

‘I’m not likely to sit here discussing politics with you, Greenhough. Will you give me a plain answer as to whether you mean to comply with my wishes?’

As Derrick spoke, he turned his eyes, which so far he had kept steadily before him, upon Abel’s face. He had expected to see there insolent defiance, and was surprised and considerably mollified to find only an expression of quiet sad thoughtfulness. Derrick’s position on horseback gave him an advantage, but Abel’s sickle was not without its dignity. Derrick could not help thinking, even in his indignation, what a splendid picture of autumn

e man would make—the easy grace of his attitude, the strength in repose that marked every turn of his figure and muscular limbs, his brown throat with the young curves in it, the glow of health in his skin, and the rings of dark hair that appeared under his picturesque t. But Derrick hated while he admired him—yes, with a desperate hatred for which he could not account. Abel, however, did not give on the occasion for such relief as an ebullition of rage would have been; he was not even looking at him, but quietly into the distance. ‘Yo ask me,’ said he gently, ‘to give up my own convenience, to add an hour or so on my working-day and take that much off my precious leisure;—more, to join you in doing others, who can afford it worse than I, do the same; and in the same breath yo bid me to understand that yo consider such I am to be too far beneath yo to enter into discussions with.’

It would have suited Derrick’s angry pride to have *felt* that the man was beneath him; but he could not. He was as worthy of

respect as an opponent of his own rank; and though he spoke with a strong accent, his English was almost as good as his own. He struggled to prevent himself from being driven by anger into a false position, and tried a more conciliatory tone.

‘I assure you, Greenhough, I am willing to do my best by my tenants and labourers. Have I not endeavoured in every way to meet their demands? But during my minority matters have got into great disorder, and I cannot take everybody’s advice as to the latitude I am to allow the people. My rights as a landlord I must of course protect; yet anything in reason I will yield. I wish to be fair.’ He paused, and then added: ‘I wish to be more than fair—*kind*.’

‘Excuse me, sir,’ said Abel, in the same gentle, inoffensive tone he had used before; ‘what right have you to be kind to us?’

Derrick’s hand gave a little jerk as he was in the act of lifting his cigar to his mouth again; a flash of surprise passed over his face; but he controlled himself.

‘Tell me,’ continued Abel, ‘how yo would like any man to come offering to be kind to yo? We do not want yor kindness, nor yor alms, nor yor favours. It is not the ordinary kindliness of man to man, but the kindness of one to his dependents, that yo offer us. For my part, I want nothing that I do not work for; I am not of a beggarly spirit. We are not yor dependents, Maister Devonporte; and if it comes to a question o’ that sort, the dependence lies o’ yor side.’

‘Are you *mad*, that you venture to speak to me like this?’ cried Derrick, in a white heat. ‘There’s a spirit abroad in my village that I shall do my utmost to crush!’

‘Not more mad than yo are, t’ speak to me as yo do,’ retorted Abel, with ominous gravity. ‘There’s a spirit i’ the land as ’ull crush all yor false pretensions one o’ these days.’

‘Look out!’ cried Derrick suddenly. The passion he felt had overleaped the barriers; he lost sight of common discretion and good sense; his teeth bit his cigar fiercely; with one hand he held in the horse that was beginning

to be infected with his excitement, and with the other he swung his riding-whip over his head.

It was the sharpest agony Derrick had ever felt in his life, to find himself two seconds afterwards lying in the dusty road, his horse standing quietly by, and Abel Greenhough, with imperturbable face, bending over him, while he said in a calm and even kind voice :

‘Yo made a bit o’ mistake then, young sir. Yo’d better git on yor horse and ride off. Now then, lads ! Back to your work ! Th’ Squire’s not hurt.’

Derrick *had* made a mistake ; he knew it, and he did not attempt to repeat it. His coat was soiled and his head a little confused, but otherwise he was not hurt—not in his body, that is. But his mental pain was intense. He saw the group of labourers who had run to his rescue tamely obeying Abel’s orders to go back to their work, and there was nothing for him to do but to take the unpalatable advice and retire vanquished from the field. But as he rode away, the smart he felt was not so

much at his hurt dignity—though this was keen—as at the rebuff he had received. We will not inquire how much the original grudge had to do with the angry disdain he felt towards Abel, for, throughout, not jealousy, but the something which inspires the war between class and class had been uppermost.

He had started his career at Hollyss, and had thought of it beforehand for years, with a not unromantic ideal of what his life-work there was to be. He had been inclined to picture his responsibilities as a beautiful and sacred trust committed to him by a wise and beneficent fate; it had never occurred to him that his right to rule, to work, to influence and guide, could be questioned by any human being. And now he found that his generous kindness and ardour were flung back in his face, and he was roundly told that they were not wanted, and that his right to perform the life-work he had designed was not recognised.

Derrick felt almost stunned by the blow; he wanted to treat it with contempt; but then Abel Greenhough had been quoted to him

over and over again as a most important personage—as the most valuable man on the most valuable farm on the estate. He had not discovered his identity with Marjorie's champion until that moment, but he saw in this fact an additional reason for according him an unwilling respect.

With the thought of Marjorie came the remembrance of her tame submission to Greenhough's will on the occasion of the village *fête*; then new anger and pain overflowed his heart. The morning's event put in a clear light the difficulties, the distasteful occurrences which a marriage with her would bring into his life; he saw them in all their bitter plainness before him. How could he take to his heart one from the class who rejected and hated him, and who therefore excited in him a corresponding fear and disdain? Would her caresses ever wipe out the remembrance of Abel's blow?

He loved her; yes—he did love her. She was the best, the sweetest, the truest woman he had ever met. But she was not for him;

nothing but discord could follow upon such a marriage. Other men were compelled to ride roughshod over their own hearts at times ; he supposed he could do so also. Better a few years' pain than a lifelong misery. In the strength of his present indignation he felt that he had the will to cut the knot of his difficulties by one vigorous blow. With hat unlifted this time, and with bowed head, he registered a vow to resist Abel Greenhough's pretensions to the bitterest end ; and, cost him what it would, to tear from his heart his newborn love for Marjorie, and for ever forswear any but lofty dealings with the class that was ready to reject his benevolence.

Then he remembered his promises to Marjorie. Well ! as a gentleman, he must keep both the one he had made upon her account and that made on Zachary's ; but he would delay the performance as long as was consistent with honour, and keep himself safe from temptation. The only reservation he allowed himself was a determination to carry the story of Greenhough's conduct to Saul

Howell (concealing, of course, that little affair of the throw from his horse), and see in what light it might present itself to his mind.

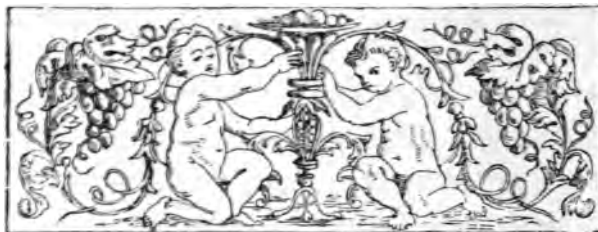
Then breathing freely again, and holding his head a little more haughtily than usual, he paid his visit to Christie's barns. Of course he gave no recital to Mr. Christie of what had occurred, but he ventured to remark that his head man appeared to possess extreme and revolutionary opinions.

'He's been giving yo some o' his ideas, has he?' said Mr. Christie, with a comfortable chuckle. 'Bless yo! what can yo expect? He's Old Scrag's nephew!'

It was far from consoling to Derrick to find that Greenhough's opinions were taken as a matter of course, and that his having broached them to the Squire was regarded as a joke. No doubt the evil had spread more deeply than he had thought.

A few days after this occurrence, a pale thin girl, frail of aspect and with anxious blue eyes, called at the Hall, and asked to see the Squire. When he came to her, she held

t a small parcel of coarse blue paper, which, on being opened, proved to contain money. was a portion of the rent owing for the Cat-lder Quarry. Derrick, when he saw the thetically small and weak little hand extended towards him, felt an ache of pity and adliness in his heart. But he controlled mself, and responding not at all to the wist-l look in her eyes, nor encouraging the ords that trembled on her lips, wrote a ceipt and handed it to her silently.



CHAPTER XV.

AT THE CAT-LADDER QUARRY.


‘Be noble ! and the nobleness that lies
In other men, sleeping, but never dead,
Will rise in majesty to meet thine own.’

LOWELL.

OLD SCRAG had his admirers ; that is to say, there were certain young men, principally ne’er-do-wells, who were attracted by the fame of his audacious wickedness. Of these, the most notable was John Morrison. It is not to be supposed for a moment that Scrag treated his followers with condescension and familiarity ; on the rare occasions when he favoured the bar of the Dog and Rosebush, where they chiefly assembled, he sat in their midst like an

antiquated hawk inspired of evil and breathing defiance and contempt to all. What these young fellows—and especially John Morrison—liked in Scrag, was the atmosphere of lawlessness that pervaded him. Freedom of speech flourished in his presence: the wildest schemes were propounded in his hearing. Scrag himself never made schemes; he sat and listened with glowing eyes, smoking fiercely the while. If he spoke, it was merely to fling out some destructive phrase that kindled a fire in the hearts of his hearers.

When at home, the presence of his two sisters somewhat modified his conduct; but the household peace and the women were only matters of toleration. He endured them as long as he could, and then breaking from all restraint, gave turbulent signs of his power: afterwards, he relapsed into indifference. There was only one thing in his experience about which he showed any ordinary humanity; this was the affection he bore for his nephew Abel. He made no demonstrations nor said



anything ; but when Abel returned home, a faint light as of momentary content appeared in his face, the fierceness of his eyes was a little subdued, and they followed the movements of his nephew watchfully.

Abel said nothing to Old Scrag about his encounter with the Squire, but by degrees the story crept out ; and some three weeks after the event it reached the ears of John Morrison, who at once carried the, by this time, highly embellished tale to the bar of the Dog and Rosebush, where he delivered it with effect. Old Scrag listened in silence, but when the story came to an end, he took his pipe from his mouth and gave vent to a low chuckle. A demonstration of this kind from Scrag was unprecedented. He had never been known to laugh or smile by any one member of the assembly, and the unusual sound broke upon them as something hollow, ominous, and terrific, rather than hilarious. The youngest man of the party confided darkly to a friend on his way home that he'd 'always been afeared that Scrag and th' owd

Boggart were thick, but now he knowed t.'

John Morrison took care that the story should be conveyed to the ears of his parents and sister. He was also especially careful to deliver it when the family were assembled together in the peace of evening ; and when he saw the startled look of pain in Marjorie's face, and the horror and disapproval of his parents, he waxed exceedingly merry, and made much sport at the Squire's expense, exaggerating and colouring the facts, and mirthfully describing his retreat. As to Abel, he exalted him to the skies, insinuating of course that the assault had originated with him, and making it appear little short of brutal. And yet the Squire was the most lashed by his story, for he was represented as currish and cowardly.

This recital took place a day or two after his encounter with his sister, and on the day that he gave it, something of a very different nature had occurred to Derrick.

The last three weeks had not been a pleasant time to him. The days following

the break-up of an ideal never are. Saul Howell, also, had failed to supply any salve for his wound. It appeared that he did not know Abel, only having heard of him as being a freethinker, even a decided sceptic—for the ill-fame of Scrag's household spread far and wide ; but he had often thought it might be his duty to seek him out and reason with him. On the present point of dispute between Abel and Derrick, however, his inclination was to side with the former. He disapproved of the game laws and their train of consequences, and moreover thought there was something fine in Greenhough's independent position. Derrick did not whine over his own sore point, of course, nor mention the short struggle there had been between them. He had a shrewd idea that Saul would laugh at the notion of settling the dispute by the physical method he had tried ; and finally, feeling more irritated than helped, he left him, and determined to take his own course ; yet his admiration of Howell was not in the least diminished.

Derrick's own course soon landed him in a

kind of covert war with his villagers. He put up fences and no-trespassing boards. These barriers Abel strode over or ignored, and, encouraged by his example, others did the same. It was in vain that the keepers gesticulated and threatened ; troops of mill-girls and labourers continued to evade pursuit, and cross the Grouse Moor and Low Wood under the leadership of Greenhough.

It was a troublesome time for Derrick, and he had not yet made up his mind what course of action he should take next. Moreover, although these matters strengthened his resolve, the ache of his forbidden love was strong in his heart. He found it no easy thing to tear up a passion by the roots and to cool his young blood by the dogmas of society and expediency. Nevertheless, his will sufficed to keep him out of the roads where he was most likely to meet Marjorie, and to make him ignore at present his promise of an invitation to the Hall.

On the morning, however, of that day whereon John was to hold him up to ridicule,

Derrick felt that he could no longer delay performing the promises he had made as to Zachary. It was Saturday, and in the afternoon he thought that he would seek him in his father's cottage. Lavinia welcomed him with a simple friendliness which was highly amusing, and informed him that Zachary was out, and would not return until the evening; upon being pressed, she acknowledged very unwillingly, and with a show of confusion, that he was to be found at the Cat-ladder Quarry.

Thither Derrick directed his steps. Cat-ladder was cut in the side of a hill, and lay to the left of a rough road used principally by the masons. Above it lay the beautiful slope of the Patch Meadow, with the little white-washed cottage in its midst, and with its edge fringed by a broad band of brush-wood which marked the uncut land belonging to the quarry. At present the cutting ran laterally into the hill, and Derrick stepped from the road into the hollow. At the entrance the work had been given up,

so that lichen, mosses, and ferns had grown over the rock and the *débris*, and long black-berry tendrils hung their beaded fruit and many-coloured leaves temptingly out of reach on the sides ; farther on, where the quarrying was continued, the rock lay bare and grey. Derrick was surprised to hear the ring of a chisel as he advanced ; not the merry tap-tap of several workmen, but the thin regular sound of a single industrious hammer. It had a somewhat weird and gnome-like effect. The Squire congratulated himself upon the result of his firmness with Pearse ; the man was evidently working hard to make up for lost time ; without yielding his principles, he began to feel that he might soften the rigour of his demands. He approached as quietly as he could over the loose *débris* ; somehow he had a desire to see him first without being seen.

Zachary was working in a corner of the quarry, where a slab, not yet disembedded from the rock, appeared to Derrick's surprise to have been in some parts already touched

by the chisel. Zachary had a smaller piece of millstone before him, at which he was working with vigorous unerring blows, or with slow delicate strokes.

Derrick watched from a distance with admiration and considerable amaze. The man was completely absorbed; there was a passionate eagerness which was not hurry in his actions, the pose of unconscious inspiration in his figure, the decision of the artist in the movements of his hand. It was easy enough to discern that something unusual was going on, and Derrick crept nearer as quietly as he could, for he was now determined to discover Zachary's secret, whether he would or not. Soon he commanded a good view of the area of the work; he could not catch a glimpse of what the man was immediately engaged upon, but he could guess at its nature accurately enough from what he saw elsewhere. Before him and around him lay a small gallery of bas-relief; it was the strangest sight he had ever beheld; cut into the sheltered part of the best bit of rock in the quarry, was a

medley of forms, rough and unfinished, as the nature of the material compelled, but true and vigorous as only a man inspired by transcendent genius could make them. The subjects were of a mixed kind, some representing such bits of life as he was likely to see in his everyday existence, others having a decided touch of strong poetic fancy.

Derrick, from his standpoint of observation, saw the small figure of a hale old farmer seated on a chair with a glass of ale resting on his knee; farther on was the head of an old man with a beard and jersey cap; close by was a head with wings—it seemed to be starting from the stone, the mouth blank with horror; across another slab galloped a youth on horseback, his cloak flying in the wind behind him; and there a muffled shape flew head-long from a huge outstretched hand, the latter being evidently taken from life.

What struck Derrick was the vigour and sense of action which was thrown into the work; and in those representing scenes of daily life, was a genial power of observation

which marked him as a man of true inspiration.

For a long time Derrick looked about him with mingled curiosity and delight. It was so strange and unexpected, that he felt as though the nursery tales of childhood had been realized, and that he had disturbed one of the inhabitants of the hills at his work. Then suddenly he remembered that this was the man upon whom he had laid the task of finding him three years of arrears of rent.

The Squire sat down upon a stone near, folded his arms, and wore upon his face the frown of deep thought. Abel's words, or rather the sting of implication contained in them, recurred to him with painful emphasis. His own rights, upon which he had insisted with such unyielding rigour, looked very paltry beside those of the man who stood in his natural workshop, forcing the common millstone grit to respond in some measure to his genius and imagination. This fact seemed beyond his principles, and in no way could he make it fit them. He thought of himself

seated in his dragon-headed chair at home, judging by his narrow experience the hungry rhapsodies of this man, starving the already straitened spirit, and burdening the weighted soul by a strict demand for paltry payments. Had Abel Greenhough known about it, and was it this which had made him so strangely severe and intolerant? Well, in the main he was right, of course, and Abel wrong; there could be no doubt of that, and the most he could allow was that his claim for rent was insignificant beside Zachary's claim to work in the way in which Nature directed him.

While he was thus busied in turning matters over in his mind, by turns troubling himself, and by turns allaying the pangs of uncertainty, a change in the monotonous sound of the chisel, which had hitherto beaten upon his ear with its softest ring and now sounded violent and unguided, caused him to look up. He found that the quarryman was engaged in the wholesale destruction of his bas-reliefs.

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Generosity was the main quality of Derrick's character. He started up with a cry, no longer hesitating to discover himself.

‘Pearse!’

The quarryman gave a parting blow and turned slowly round. He surveyed Derrick for a second or two with the dazed unrecognising eyes of one absorbed in his own emotions, and when the circumstance of Derrick's presence dawned upon him, he turned away again, and threw down his chisel with a cold vexed air of annoyance, that chilled the Squire, and made it a thousand times more difficult for him to proceed.

‘Theer!’ said Zachary, when he had tossed aside his chisel.

To Derrick this monosyllable conveyed less meaning than the air with which it was pronounced. To Zachary, who now sank down upon a slab to rest his lame leg, folding his arms, and staring wearily at the ground, it signified his perception that the culminating moment of his disaster had arrived.



‘Why were you destroying them?’ asked Derrick involuntarily.

‘To prevent them destroying me, I suppose.’

‘May I look at your work?’ petitioned the embarrassed Squire.

‘Oh, certinly. I reckon yo’ve seen it by this time,’ replied Zachary ironically.

Derrick stooped over the piece which the quarryman had in hand, and which he had fortunately made no attempt to destroy. It was a profile in bas-relief of Marjorie Morrison. The features, the throat, the ear, were finished; the stone still prisoned the hair, and caused the graceful rings to terminate in unshaped masses; but this fact gave the touch of fancy to the work, and turned it into a poem.

Derrick bent over it, stooping a great deal nearer the slab than was necessary, because his drilled and tutored heart relaxed suddenly at the sight of his mistress’s image, and he longed to kneel down and kiss the little stone chin and mouth; he felt the courage of his

resistance going from him, and that the rock was drawing him into captivity, as it had drawn the sweet hair of Marjorie.

‘Is this for sale?’ asked he presently.

‘Sale?’ said Zachary, waking up from his reverie.


‘I will give you fifty guineas for it, Pearse, if you will finish it for me. Stay! No; I’d rather have it as it is, if you will let me.’

‘Fifty guineas! That ’ud nigh cover the rent, or go a long way to it with what I’ve paid,’ said Zachary mechanically.

‘The rent!’ cried Derrick, with a blush like a girl. ‘The rent doesn’t matter. I’ll pass it over, of course. I did not know, Pearse—I had no idea!’

He spoke with rapidity and nervousness, shocked now to find that the very thing had happened which he had intended should happen—namely, that the rent was the matter weighing heaviest upon the man’s mind.

Zachary, still with his arms folded, lifted his eyes and surveyed him.



‘I do not understand yo, maister.’

‘I mean what I say: the rent doesn’t matter,’ said Derrick hastily.

‘How so, maister? Yo were strong enough about it a month or so ago. If it were right then, it’s right now.’

‘But this work of yours has repaid me, Pearse,’ cried Derrick energetically; ‘look what you’ve put into my stone!’

‘As to that, maister,’ returned Zachary, looking partly with fondness and partly with discontent at his gallery, ‘I’ve mangled th’ best bit o’ stone i’ yor quarry. And th’ picturs canna be’ removed; they’ll spoil wi’ the wear and tear o’ weather i’ time, just as well as if I’d hammered ’em all up as I meant to.’

‘Do you mean,’ said Derrick pitifully, ‘that all this labour, all this beauty is wasted?’

‘If yo mean, can I get it off the rock—no, I canna.’

‘Not this—this profile,’ said Derrick, who

felt an invincible objection to mentioning Marjorie's name.

'Yes ; that's on a small loose piece that I could hammer away.'

'Then you accept my offer for it ?'

Zachary eyed him suspiciously.

'Look yo, maister, I've done those picturs i' stone for the same reason that I eat or breathe. I eat or breathe because nature drives me to it, and for no special end o' my own, for the desire o' life is not with me. And I've done those things because I'm impelled to it, and not with a view to getting money, for I did na know they were worth money. And if it's charity yo're offering me at the end o' these bitter months—well ! yo're kind—but I'd rather not.'

'It is not charity,' said Derrick, earnestly and gently ; 'it is a fair price for a beautiful piece of sculpture that I greatly desire to possess. I have bought such things before, you know ; and I have given more for what I care less about.'

'Do yo class my things,' said Zachary,

with a sudden excitement in voice and face, 'wi' the things at the Hall?'

'Unquestionably I do, Pearse.'

'Good Lord!' said Zachary to himself, 'that 'ud make it worth while t' live on.'

He unfolded his arms and leaned them upon his knees, and looked up and straight before him, apparently unconscious of Derrick's presence. He sat in this position for long, his face the index of emotions so deep, so passionate, that Derrick felt abashed at standing by to witness them.

Presently he stooped over the man and touched him lightly on the shoulder.

'Will you come up to the Hall?' said he, with a great penitence and sorrow in his heart; 'to-night, I mean. I have a proposal to make.'

Zachary stirred and waked from his reverie, and rose as the Squire concluded his sentence. The two men looked straight into each other's faces, Zachary's still wearing a look of hesitation and doubt. Derrick read it as plainly as he read in the broad brow and deep eyes

the marks of his superior in intellect ; but it was easier to bow mentally before the ascendancy of genius than it had been to recognise in Abel the spirit of an equal.

‘ Will you come ? ’ asked Derrick again.

‘ Aye. I’ll come. ’

‘ And——’ the Squire hesitated, but he longed to see the doubting look dispelled from Zachary’s face, and he shrank from receiving a repulse from this man such as Abel had given him, so that he continued his speech—‘ you will take it for granted that I mean well by you ; and you won’t mistrust me—not think me a humbug because—why, because I’m the Squire. ’

A smile came upon Zachary’s wan face. He understood that Mr. Devonporte was making a great effort, and in response he silently held out his hand. The Squire took it with a bewildered sense that he had been driven by circumstances to apologize for the rank, upon which he had hitherto based every social calculation, as though it were a hindrance and superfluity.



CHAPTER XVI.

THE MINISTER PAYS A PASTORAL VISIT.

‘From his intellect,
And from the stillness of abstracted thought,
He asked repose.’

WORDSWORTH.

DERRICK'S life was not entirely spent amongst the villagers nor wholly engrossed with village affairs. He gathered around him, when he could, a choice selection of friends from the old college days; and on the occasion of his Aunt Clementina bringing her boxes and herself to stay for a season before fluttering off again upon a round of winter gaiety, the Hall became the arena of a female tournament, wherein the fair aspirants for the rich young

Squire's favour tilted with each other in that noiseless graceful way which leaves the spectator in doubt as to whether he has witnessed a combat or not.

In these lively scenes, at the dinner-parties, the tennis afternoons, the bachelor meetings, but much more frequently the quiet evening with Derrick alone, Saul Howell was a constant guest. He brought his fasting nature to the board of life, and deeply did he feast. He was always welcome there; brilliant and original as in his younger days, he had added to himself the sum of a strange and lonely experience, an exceptional self-discipline, which gave him an ascendancy over his fellows. The women feared and worshipped him, and had an inclination towards religious revival; the men expanded their ideas and eloquently expressed opinions and feelings, which, to be strictly true, it must be acknowledged had only sprung into being in his presence. He brought a highly emotional atmosphere with him in which that which was spiritual in the natures around him flourished

and grew—perhaps with a somewhat spurious fungus growth.

Saul himself was as real and as earnest as man could be; it was not his fault if his influence became as a forcing-bed to natures less deep than his own. Yet to himself this season was one of disturbance. All power and brilliance at the Hall, on his return to his own home he found himself moody and filled with gloom. The rapid encroachment of intellect upon spirit had broken up that dead peace in which he had lived so long; and the tremendous ideal which he had contemplated and worshipped in the dim Elysian light of pure faith, was fading before the restlessness of an intellectual day.

The emancipation from a state of slavery, while theoretically desirable, is not always a pleasant experience. Wide pastures of liberty become as deserts when the idea of their boundlessness intrudes; and the mind dreams that the distance may terminate in abysses, into which it may be the lot to fall endlessly and hopelessly.

Something of this mental scare began to creep into the recesses of Howell's mind. It had been easy at first to make reason subservient to faith; to make her play like the rainbow about the throne. But was it not possible that, as a fire, she might burst forth not to illumine, but to destroy?

The outward form, the action, in which Saul's religious thought had clothed itself had been of course his duties as 'the minister' of Milltown. How irksome these were beginning to appear he scarcely dared confess to himself; the littlenesses of the chapel interests, the commonplace events which the deacons regarded as of paramount importance, assumed more than their share of meaninglessness.

Paltry, vulgar, distasteful did the whole round of chapel business show, if he ventured to look critically upon it; but he did not venture; as he had once smothered the activity of his intellect, so did he now endeavour to smother the outcry of his heart against the life he had imposed upon himself.

He had been accustomed to invest the deacons' meetings, the weekly address, the Sunday-school management, the tea-meetings, baptisms, communions, burials, etc., with all the gracious beauty of his own religious imagination. He looked at the vulgar uninteresting faces of his deacons through the rose-light of Christian enthusiasm; he saw the end, not the means, in all he did; he heard the echoes of humanity through the most commonplace utterances of the people in whom he was bound to interest himself; now with preoccupied mind he perceived nothing but what was eminently distasteful.

After an unusually interesting evening at the Hall, he rose one morning towards the end of September with a sickening feeling of distaste at the idea of the 'church-meeting' which was to be held that evening in the vestry of his chapel, and for which it was his duty to prepare an address. As he drew aside the blind of his bedroom window and looked upon the bleak grey hill that rose immediately before him, at the mill, with its

defiling smoke, lying in the cleft beneath, and at the stacks of roofs and chimneys that clustered on all sides, his heart turned from his fate with the recoil of unutterable repugnance. He thought of the green fields and woods, the gentle undulations of Hollyss, the stately grace of the life at the Hall, into which he sank so naturally when he came there; he remembered the exhilarating converse of the night before—that intellectual grappling of the mind with difficult questions which had become of absorbing interest to him; and when he compared this with the ugly paltriness of the things upon which to-day he must expend his strength, a feeling of unspeakable despair seized upon him. Good God! how young he still felt, how strong, how ready for great work, and for every earthly experience—and yet, how prisoned by his wretched position, how pinioned by his miserable fate! To wake up after a dream, a fit of drunkenness or madness, and find that one has sold one's birthright!

Saul turned out of his bedroom and

walked downstairs to his sitting-room. The maid-servant was putting his boots to warm at the fire, the breakfast was spread, the letters lying by his plate ; she, looking up at her master as he entered, saw nothing unusual in his remarkable face save that he appeared rather tired ; and yet in the man's heart the enactment of a great tragedy was beginning.

It was a momentary relief to Saul to find that one of his letters bore the post-mark of Hollyss. The paper was poor, but the handwriting firm and manly ; the contents, correctly and yet rather stiffly worded, proved to be from Zachary Pearse, and were to the effect that his father was more ailing than usual, and would be glad if the minister would walk over to Hollyss to see him.

Hollyss always meant to Saul, amongst other things, a chance of meeting with Marjorie. He leaned his elbows on the table and his face on his hands, pushing aside the breakfast paraphernalia, and fell into a dream of a fair woman when he had read the letter.

This poor minister was terribly alive to earth now that he had once opened the door to nature; the thought of Marjorie sufficed him often for breakfast; it threw him into a feverish condition of hope and joy and certainty, and made him snatch at the delusion that through Marjorie would come to him something of deliverance from his position. When he had married Marjorie, thought he, he would have had his share of life, and could well bear the rest.

Saul determined, after he had read the letter, that he would deliver an old address to the deacons and indefatigable members of his congregation that evening, and so save himself the work of preparing a new one. This morning he would go to Hollyss and visit Zachary's father.

The genial weather, so suitable for harvest-time, still continued; it was ripening the corn that yet stood in Mr. Christie's fields, making his men and horses work with redoubled zeal, and causing the smile on his broad face to emulate that of the sun itself;

it made the beautiful acres of Hollyss more lovely with the hues of plenty and warmth, and as Mr. Howell stood upon the bleak road on the hillside and looked down upon the soft undulations that showed through a cleft in the moors, he thought of it as an enchanted land, as a rock-guarded spot from whence misery and degradation perchance had been banished. To his left lay the great purple sweep of heather, inhabited of grouse, and beneath it was the skirt of the well-wooded park; then came the pleasant undulations of Christie's large farm, the scorched patches of the corn-fields turning gradually into an emerald green as the fresh grass sprang up side by side with the stubble. And then came the valley in which the trout-brook ran, looking from the distance at which he stood only like a darting ray hiding in and out of the bushes. Farmer Morrison's farm, the Cockshuthey, was to the right, or rather it lay beyond Christie's, on the slope of a hill which caught the morning sun pleasantly and revealed the picturesque gap of an old deserted quarry.

Cockshuthey itself peeped white and glittering from its cluster of trees. When Saul saw it, his heart exulted, and the question sprang into his mind—should he meet Marjorie?

Yes; he was destined to meet her. When Life intends to cheat us, everything is allowed to fall out as we would wish; it is only when Life is kind that she is inexorable. The Pearses' cottage was beyond Cockshuthey; it nestled low down in the valley, and was completely out of sight. Saul took a short cut across a barren bit of moor and some wild sloping fields, and then got into a rough road which, in spite of the warm season, still had the trickling remnants of various springs running here and there across it, and at last into a quiet green lane that would lead him eventually into the highway. It was here he met Marjorie. She was walking along knitting, as was her custom, but her pace was more languid than usual. As the minister approached, he was touched to remark the pensive air which she wore.

‘Marjorie! Good-morning.’

With a smile of pleasure, Marjorie curtsied, and stood still until he reached her.

‘Are you going my way?’

‘Aye, sir! I’ve a message to take to yon cottage.’

‘We can walk together, then?’

And so on. I cannot say that the conversation was much. Marjorie was absent; Saul spoke in low and feeling tones, which he trusted and intended should reach her heart. Now and then he stole a glance at her face, and was inexpressibly moved when he saw that the colour kept deepening in her cheeks and then faded suddenly. At length they reached the cottage and the parting came; he stood still, holding her hand and looking down upon her with his soul in his eyes. He had never been so near—*felt* so near, that is, before; her hand lay in his unresisting, and if she did not return his passionate pressure, at least she did not resent it; there was a shy mournfulness in her eyes, and a hesitation in her manner, that were unutterably sweet to him. Was it not natural that he should interpret

these signs as his own longings prompted? Yet if he had read her heart he would have seen only these words:

‘I am perplexed—I am troubled. I am full of misgivings that I can share with no one else. Shall I tell them to this wise, good friend—this man of God—and ask him if he can show me a way out of the woe and fear that I feel?’

It was the hesitation and decision, ever repeated during their walk, involved in this question, which caused the fluctuation of colour in Marjorie’s cheek. And when the final moment came, and she felt her inborn reticence lay a seal upon her lips, the sense that the opportunity had come and passed away occupied her wholly, so that her hand lay in his palm enduring its pressure unconsciously. She mutely bade him adieu, and turned away with her own unlifted burden; as for him, he went on his way to Zachary’s cottage, with a score of delusive hopes weaving the colours of dreamy happiness before his eyes.

When he arrived and entered, William

Pearse, who was sitting on his usual seat by the fire, looked up at him with a brightness which Zachary's letter had not led him to expect. Old Scrag was there, and his sister Ann Scrag; Mrs. Pearse, hastily tying a clean blue check apron over the turned-up skirt of her dress, came and sat down in the circle with the air of one waiting to be edified. Ann Scrag uttered a deep sigh—she was eminently religious—and this was intended as a signal; Old Scrag neither removed his cap from his head nor his pipe from his mouth. All this cottage circumstance would have bored Saul inexpressibly had it not been that his blood ran genially through his veins after the meeting with Marjorie.

‘And how are you, Pearse?’ said he, bending kindly over the old man.

‘Ay! I’m gaining strength fast. It’s same as if some one were shooin’ it in at th’ door.’

‘I’m glad to hear that. Zachary gave me to understand that you were not so well,’ said Saul, taking a chair near him.


‘Ay! there’s stops i’ music, mon! It’s not allays the same. I were very tickle yester-neet.’

‘He’s going as fast as he con,’ put in Mrs. Pearse; ‘it’s a passell o’ nonsense to talk o’ gaining strength.’

Saul started with dismay at these plain words, and looked anxiously at William; but the latter only said ‘H’m,’ and then, raising his face, asked with his bright gentle look:

‘I reckon yo’ve heard the news about Zachary?’

‘Ay!’ screamed Mrs. Pearse, ‘we were that turned inside out by it last night as yo niver did. Lavinia she says to me, “Mother,” she says—she’d gone that very afternoon to th’ Hall to carry Maister Derrick’s shirts; which it can’t be expected that me, as has to do all th’ weshing and fettle for William, can fetch and carry like the very beasts that till the earth, and the kitchen floor to scrub and all. Yo dunna know, and none knows as I knows on, though I says it as shouldn’t, what labour and moiling there is after William



since he took ill. Ay! the bottles I've rubbed into him for rheumatiz alone! and Zachary with a lame leg as has been a mother's cross, and I trust to the Lord, Maister Howell, hereafter her crown—well, Lavinia she says to me last night—the clock were turning close on to seven—"Mother," she says——'

'Woman!' interrupted Scrag, suddenly and with a volume in his voice that made his hearers leap, 'hold thee noise, and let thee betters speak!'

'No, no,' said Howell courteously, seeing in his amusement that Mrs. Pearse, when she had explored her oceans of experience, would come to anchor at last upon her point. 'No, no! Pray continue, Mrs. Pearse; I am anxious to hear about Zachary.'

'Thou'll niver hear from *her*,' said Scrag contemptuously; 'hoo'll drag thee through her wesh-tub next, like a wisp o' damp linen. Mind *me*. Devonporte's took up Zachary, and says he's going t' mak a mon o' him—if he does na *unmak* him. He's going to

set him on his own loom and work him into his own pattern.'

Having delivered himself of these metaphors with snarling contempt, Old Scrag replaced his pipe in his mouth, and abstracted his attention. He had not the slightest doubt but that he had made himself understood; Mr. Howell, however, more bewildered than ever, looked round for further elucidation.

It came presently—thrown out by William as a kind of afterthought in the midst of exclamation and description of various parts of personal experience, from Mrs. Pearse and Ann Scrag. The uneducated assume a superhuman knowledge of facts in the minds of their hearers, and are eager only to explain some recondite thought or circumstance which strikes upon their imagination as extraordinary. The fact, when at last it appeared, proved to be that the Squire had found certain 'stone picturs' of Zachary's in the quarry, had pronounced him 'a great genii,' and was going to send him up to London for education, and that he would set

out on his new life with all the speed possible.

Saul felt much moved when he heard this. The loosing of a fellow-creature, who was nearly connected with his own life, from the bonds of a dreary fate, gave him a sense of hopefulness and relief. Besides the interest he felt in Zachary, he could not avoid thinking that what had happened in the experience of one man might be possible in that of another; so that it was with almost the feeling of a personal joy that he leaned forward and said gravely and heartily to William:

‘I am very glad to hear this. It will be the making of Zachary.’

‘Ay, but, maister,’ put in Ann Scrag, who had been aching to throw in a damping word or two, ‘Lunnon’s a throng place!’

‘Aye, sure,’ rejoined William contentedly, while such images of life and bustle as he was able to picture dimly disturbed his brain; ‘I reckon there’ll be a bus i’ Lunnon welly (nearly) ivery day.’

He looked up shyly and gently, with

apologetic eyes, after this remark, fearful lest his imagination should have betrayed him into extremes.

‘It’s awful t’ think on,’ pursued Ann, shaking her head; ‘th’ poor lame lad ’ull be lost i’ the midst o’ the moil. I only hope he winna be led astray i’ the wilderness like sheep!’

‘Ann, thou makes foolish wark wi’ thy tongue,’ remarked Old Scrag. ‘Here’s th’ minister; let him speak up and warm us wi’ a bit o’ his doctrine.’

Scrag directed his jeering looks towards Howell, but the latter vouchsafed no immediate reply. Turning towards William, he said :

‘If Zachary has time, I should like him to come over to Milltown and spend an hour or two with me some evening before he goes.’

‘Yo’re very kind, maister; he’ll be proud t’ come, I’m sure.’

‘And what dun yo think on ’t?’ pressed Mrs. Pearse, longing for a triumph over Ann Scrag.

‘I think it an excellent thing for your son; a chance we none of us could have expected would come to him. And as to there being any fear for him in London, he will find it as safe a place as Hollyss, I dare say. Zachary is well able to take care of himself, and it is a good thing for a young man to see the world.’

‘Aye! th’ minister’s right,’ cried Mrs. Pearse shrilly. ‘He’ll take no harm.’

‘Dunna be too sure.’

‘He winna, I tell thee! Thou reklects that passage o’ Scripture as says, “Ivery tub must stand on it own bottom”?’

‘Aye,’ replied Ann mistily, but determined not to acknowledge ignorance.

‘Yo’ll find it,’ continued Mrs. Pearse, with a broad sense of the safety of assertion, ‘i’ th’ Lamentations o’ Jeremy, “*Ivery tub must stand on it own bottom.*” Well, it’s time as Zach did the same.’

‘Scriptur’s again’ thee, Ann; so make no more a-doo, but come whoam wi’ me,’ said Scrag, rising slowly. ‘William, thou’ll have

thy lad's hair combed out i' new fashion now. It'll be an ill thing if when he comes whoam he's too grand t' speak t' his owd feyther, and wants t' hob-a-nob wi' them darned squires. My Abe shall stop wheer he is. Lunnon, indeed! A squire's lap-dog! Nay! I wouldna have *my* boy French-poodled!

Muttering these words, the picturesque old man re-arranged his blue cap upon his head, nodded friendly towards William, darted a glance of bitter contempt at Howell, and moved towards the door, followed by Ann.

'Yo'll mak us a bit o' prayer,' shouted Mrs. Pearse to Saul as soon as they were gone, and only regretting that an opportunity for this display had not arisen earlier.

As she made the request, she threw a piece of old carpet to his feet, in order, as was apparent, to spare him the soiling of his knees. Saul started up with the impulse to escape; he felt angry and exasperated; a painful sense of shame and humiliation brought the colour to his cheek. Was there

any possible excuse? No; Mrs. Pearse had already swept down upon her knees, and William, with a touching reverence, was endeavouring to bend his stiffened joints in obedience to the call. There was no escape; he had often knelt by the hearth of the cottager before, but then there had been a glow in his heart, a fervent religious faith. To-day there was nothing but bitterness and revolt; contempt for his position and longing to escape from it was his prime sentiment; and in the midst of the sunny morning, when the sounds of life and earth were loud in his ears, he was called to the incongruity of extempore prayer. He knelt because he was obliged to do so, and uttered a few mechanical, commonplace, confused sentences.

He rose from his knees with a sickening sense of degradation, to find that he had disappointed his hearers, who had expected a more emotional treat; and then, with his face white and stern in his repressed misery, he bade adieu to William, and managed to get away.

It was the intolerable sense of shame that drove him to seek some slight consolation by returning over the ground which he had traversed with Marjorie. He sought her footsteps in the dust, recalled her words and looks, and nursed their memory in his heart with most passionate irrational ardour.



CHAPTER XVII.

IN THE PICTURE GALLERY.

‘The flower of sweetest smell is shy and lowly.’
WORDSWORTH.

THE news of Zachary’s extraordinary good luck and her invitation to the Hall reached Marjorie upon the same day: they almost came to her simultaneously. But neither of them arrived through the medium of her brother John. He concealed the knowledge of Derrick’s good action as long as he could, and when he found that it had come to the ears of the family at Cockshuthey he turned it as much as was possible into matter for ridicule and suspicion; when, however, he heard that Mrs. Finch had

called at the farm and left an invitation for Marjorie to take tea with her in the house-keeper's room, he broke into an ungoverned fury. Marjorie shuddered at the cold scorn, the contemptuous invective he heaped upon her when he found that she was willing to go ; and when he discovered that not only were his parents inclined to permit her, but actually intended that she should do so, his rage and ill-temper rendered life at the farm almost unbearable.

‘ I a'most wish,’ sighed Marjorie to herself, as she went to her room to dress for the occasion, ‘ that the Squire *had* forgot me as I thought he had—not Zach ; ay ! I'm fain he's so good to the poor lad, though it makes me terrible lonesome to think as he's going away. It were a bit o' comfort t' hear on him now and again from Lavvy.’

Then Marjorie opened one of the deep, old-fashioned drawers ; as she did so, a strong smell of lavender pervaded the room. She took out a black silk dress, which had been carefully and lightly folded so as to lie along

the whole length of the drawer. This was the girl's one state article of apparel, the company garment whose purchase had been a veritable investment of capital, and which had been made by a Milltown dressmaker instead of by her own hands. Marjorie had never liked the dress ; she could not feel natural in it, and it called the blood up into her cheek to hear herself making a noisy rustling as she walked. When she had shaken out the folds and held it up before her and examined it carefully, she laid it upon the bed, and sat thoughtfully looking at it. Her mother, she knew, expected her to come down arrayed in this finery, and with a large crochet collar and gold brooch, containing a view of the pier at Blackpool, as additional splendours. But Marjorie loathed these things. Why should the dress be made at once unpleasantly tight, and yet lumpy and full where it was not needed ?

‘ Iveryone i’ this house has their own idea about th’ Squire and th’ Hall. I,’ said Marjorie, with unusual wilfulness, ‘ ’ull have

mine. I'll go natural, or I'll not go at all. I'd rayther be a dairymaid than a sham fine leddy.'

So saying, with the most housewifely care she refolded and replaced the obnoxious garment in the drawer, breathing more freely when it was concealed from view. And then she took her second-best dress—a blue linsey, which she had just finished making, and which was gradually to take the place of her working-dress—from the hook, and holding it before her, looked lovingly down upon it.

'I'll put this on, and my fine-linen appern, and th' new frill as I made; and I canna be wrong, let mither say what she will.'

Marjorie's toilette was soon complete, and very lovely did she look in the modest soft-coloured dress, with skirt short enough and full enough to walk easily in, with tight bodice and white apron and frills.

'Marjorie! whativer!' cried Mrs. Morrison, when the girl entered the front kitchen to say good-bye and show herself before leaving.

‘Why, wheer’s thy fine black dress?’ asked Farmer Morrison, in the same breath.

‘Mither! Dad!’ said Marjorie, unhooking her grey shawl and straw hat from the cupboard; ‘yo must let me a-be! I’m o’er-faced enough at going t’ such a grand place; and if I put on something as I canna rightly breathe in and as crackles and rustles at ivery turn, I shall shame yo and mysel. It’s Mrs. Finch as I’m visiting, and th’ blue linsey’s good enough, I’m thinking; I’m not to ape the fine leddies as were there when Miss Clementina come back.’

‘Marjorie’s right,’ said John, with unexpected acquiescence. ‘Although it’s her right to be i’ th’ grandest room i’ th’ Hall, if she has a proper pride she’ll keep away from that milk-and-water Squire. If she’d a properer, she wouldna go at all.’

‘Well, well, children,’ said Farmer Morrison wearily, while Mrs. Morrison showed signs of tears, ‘settle it amongst yosels. I can trust my Marjorie t’ keep her pride clean. But thou, John, art foriver making ill-blood by

rubbing up a sore as should ha' been healed a hunnerd year ago.'

Marjorie, feeling a little disheartened at her mother's disappointed face, and at having been the occasion of renewed disputing, folded her shawl about her and turned out into the bright autumnal air. She was surprised to find that her eyes were dim with tears when she opened the meadow-gate and got into the quiet lane. As she had passed through the yard and the first field considerable excitement had been displayed by the poultry, and there was a stirring of interest amongst the cattle; these had occupied her attention, and kept her head turning from right to left with bright and lively looks. But in the meadow all was still, and her heart found leisure to be conscious of itself, of its hidden perplexity, of the dim and sad prevision of approaching events.

'If I only knowed what ails me! If it only werena all so dark! If I could only feel as I used!'

She looked up to the drooping brilliant-

coloured foliage, and then at the golden carpet of fallen leaves which her own feet trod into the earth; and beyond to the sleepy sunlight fading slowly from the ruddy woods, at the quiet amber of the clouds that lay over the bleak hills of Milltown; and as her observant and receptive nature took in the autumnal beauty she felt a touch of strange excitement, the bending towards her, as it were, of an invisible life which mingled with the sense of whatever was unusual in her visit to the Hall.

From the lodge to the house there was a considerable distance of pleasant cultivated land to traverse; there was no special road to the back regions of the house; it was necessary to cross the front, to go round the terrace of the eastern wing, and then to open a gate into a courtyard. As Marjorie passed the terrace she looked up, started, and paused.

‘Why, they’ve opened the steps up to the terrace! and cut the ivy from the window! And there’s a fire blazing in the room—for it canna be sunlight o’ this side!’

Involuntarily hastening her steps, and with wondering thoughts in her mind, she reached the back-door, and rang for admittance.

Mrs. Finch had received orders from Derrick to take Miss Morrison at once into the house-keeper's room, and to serve tea there privately for her, and by no means to allow her to mingle with the servants of the establishment. Thus Marjorie was saved from the feeling of shrinking shyness that overcame her at the sight of the two or three liveried men-servants whom she encountered; by the time tea was over she recovered her natural serenity, and began to long for the moment when the treasures, of which she had heard so much from Zachary, were to be shown her. It was therefore with delight that she heard Mrs. Finch at last give orders that the Gallery and certain rooms should be lighted up, and shortly afterwards propose that they should begin their tour of inspection.

Marjorie would have enjoyed stopping to look at some of the rooms through which they passed, or at least to have lingered over the

pictures that hung in the passages, or the statues and curiosities of which she caught glimpses on the landings and stairs. But Mrs. Finch, evading all hints, led her on through what appeared a maze of turnings and doublings, until, suddenly opening a small door which showed a few steps upwards, she bade her mount them and enter the Gallery. Marjorie did so, and found herself in a blaze of light and splendour. Turning to make an exclamation of wonder and pleasure to the good lady who had brought her, she discovered to her surprise that she was alone.

For a few moments Marjorie remained standing upon the same spot, gazing shyly about her, taking in nothing in detail, but feeding upon the beauty of the general effect. It only seemed part of a fairy dream, when she suddenly became aware that the Squire was approaching slowly from the other end of the long room, coming she knew not from whence.

The sight of him, however, recalled her.

The memory of past dissatisfaction, and of certain sharp self-blaming thoughts was by no means obliterated. Waiting, therefore, with downcast eyes until he was near enough, she stepped quietly and respectfully aside, made a low curtsy, and turned her attention to the nearest work of art. The Squire came to a standstill.

‘ Marjorie !’

‘ Yes, sir ?’

Now Derrick had weakened his resolution to abstain from pursuing a friendship with Marjorie Morrison by continually inspecting the stone profile which Zachary had cut.

When a man has quite made up his mind to take no more interest in a woman, it is unwise of him, to say the least, to frame and hang up her effigy in his chamber, and to remark constantly that the lines of her head are perfect. Had Derrick never visited the Cat-ladder Quarry, he might perhaps have been able to keep his resolution of leaving Marjorie entirely to the care of Mrs.

Finch when he fulfilled his promise of inviting her to the Hall. But under the influence of that rough medallion he had persuaded himself that it was absolutely necessary for him to speak to her concerning Zachary's fate; also he must satisfy himself that she resembled the portrait which he had found in the mysterious chamber, and which was now propped against the wall beneath its presumed original place in the Gallery. Again, had Marjorie, when this meeting occurred, shown the slightest inclination to renew their acquaintance on the lines of special friendship upon which they had last left it, the human contradictoriness which lies hidden in most manly breasts would perhaps have come to his aid. But the most finished coquetry could not have helped a disastrous result so efficiently as did Marjorie's simple conscientiousness. When he saw her living beauty before him again, and remarked that she was content to withdraw to a distance with an indifference which had every appearance of reality, the restless instinct of pursuit

waked in his breast and aided his ill-suppressed passion. He came forward and stood close by her side. She turned her head and opened her eyes with an air of surprise.

‘Do you like my Gallery?’ asked he, now on fire, and resolved in a quite opposite direction from formerly.

‘It’s rare. But at first there’s so much that I can see nothing rightly.’

‘I am going to show it to you and explain.’

‘Thank yo, sir.’

‘Marjorie——’

‘Aye, sir?’

‘Well! No matter at present. Come along and look at this great creature here. It’s a statue of Pallas Athene—but you won’t understand that. It’s a goddess—a made-up sort of being that an old nation, called the Greeks, worshipped—but you won’t care for that either, only people think it’s beautiful.’

‘Zachary, sir, has read to me about Pallas Athene; and he lent me a book of the history of the Greeks, and for a long time I thought

it the best of the books he'd got. And I *do* think it beautiful, sir, and like she must have looked when she came to the man in the dream.'

'And where did Zachary read about Athene?' asked Derrick, wondering and half-jealous.

'In a book called "The Heroes." I thought it were a fairy-tale, sir.'

'Ah, I know. Would you like to have it for your own?'

'Surely, sir. But Zach has—the book was—he hasn't it now, sir.'

Derrick made no reply, but led her on from picture to picture, enjoying her delight and smiling to himself as her reserve began to melt under the power of mingled curiosity and rapture. She began to ask questions, to reveal her impressions, to make exclamations of pity, or abhorrence, or pleasure, as he told her story after story. At last they came to the picture, now restored by some artist, which Derrick had brought from the locked chamber. He purposely made no remark, but

stood at a little distance comparing the beauty of the living girl with that of the painted lady. Marjorie looked at it long and silently.

‘Does it remind you of anyone?’ he asked.

Marjorie hesitated.

‘Who is it?’ she said, in a low voice.

‘It cannot be *you*, Marjorie, because it is an old picture that has been painted for over a century,’ he said lightly.

‘Have you had it for long?’ she asked, as though scarcely understanding his words.

‘Not in the Gallery. I found it locked up in an old room——’

‘In the room on the East Terrace! Ah!’

‘Yes. How did you know?’

‘But I didna know!’

‘How do you know there is a room on the East Terrace which was locked up?’

Derrick had come closer, and was looking eagerly and searchingly at her. Marjorie had a certain confusion and hesitation in manner, and yet she returned his scrutiny.

‘How should I *not* know about the room i’ the East Terrace! Is na it the thing which o’ all others I’m most like to know?’

‘For the life of me, Marjorie, I cannot understand. Look at me. Ah! so. Now answer this question. Is that picture like you, or not?’

‘Aye, sir. It is like me, but a hundred times more beautiful; it’s wonderful gracious and fine.’

‘*Why* is it like you?’

‘Why, Maister Derrick,’ said the girl simply, ‘yo can tell me that easy yosel. Why are childer th’ varry pictur o’ their parents at times? I suppose it’s like me because she was my great - great - great—I dunna know how many—grandmother.’

Derrick, in great excitement, seized the girl’s hands in both of his suddenly, and pulled her round so that she was forced to stand looking in his face.

‘But tell me what *your* great - great - great—I don’t know how many—grandmother

has to do with *me*, and why her portrait was concealed in the Hall.'

The girl's face assumed an expression of surprise and perplexity.

'But yo *know* it, Maister Derrick!'

'Tell me!' replied the youth, speaking with great eagerness. 'Did she—was she *my* great-great-great-grandmother's sister?'

'Aye. Yo know. Her *elder* sister.'

'And she ran away with your great, etc., grandfather?'

'Aye; and wed him. His name were Martin Morrison—same as my feyther.'

'And how do you know it all?'

'Oh! we have the writing about it; and there's the registry i' the old church at Mill-town, and the thing I wear round my neck. Besides, we *do* know it; it was so—— And no offence to yo, I hope, Maister Derrick.'

The last words were spoken with a sudden resumption of the air of reserved pride; and a little trouble began to show itself in her eyes.

'What is it you wear round your neck?'

‘ Loose my hands, sir, and then I can show yo.’

‘ No, I won’t loose your hands yet, Marjorie. Dear Marjorie ! My cousin Marjorie ! Will you *swear* to me that you’re my cousin Marjorie ?’

‘ Aye, sir. In a long-way-off sort of manner.’

‘ *Cousin Marjorie !* Is it luck or fate !’

‘ Oh, Maister Derrick, loose my hands ! Yo knowed it before. Yo must ha’ knowed it before. It isn’t me as has told you !’

The girl’s eyes were beginning to fill with tears, and trouble was the uppermost expression in her face.

‘ Don’t look like that, my—— I mean Marjorie. Of course I knew it. It is the very thing I said to myself after I had seen the old picture ’—they were standing near it all the time, and he inclined his head sideways towards it as he spoke, without taking his eyes from the beautiful face that was so close to his own—‘ yes ; I said it to myself. I will loose your hands if you ask me. See ! I’m holding

them gently now. Don't take them away, though. I've never held my cousin's hands before.'

She withdrew one of them quietly, and reluctantly left the fingers of the other lying in his palm, and turned away.

'Are you sorry? Are you glad?' she asked in a low, anxious, dubious sort of voice.

'Look in my face and see!'

And she did look. And then suddenly the lips of both parted, and they burst into a merry peal of laughter. Surely in that innocent sound the family feud, and scare, and curse exploded and vanished into air.

'I thought you knew it as well as I did,' said Marjorie; 'and that was the reason you took notice of me, and were so kind.'

'Did you? No, that was not the reason. Ah! you're going to show me what it is you wear round your neck.'

She drew a ribbon from her dress, to which was attached a large old-fashioned locket, containing a miniature of the same face as that of

the portrait. On the gold was engraved the name 'Eleanor Marjorie Devonporte,' and then the date. Beneath was scratched 'To M. M.,' and then a second date which was almost illegible. Derrick and Marjorie looked at it together, and he insisted upon himself replacing the ribbon. She seemed pleased, and yet there was nervousness and anxiety in her manner.

'I must go now,' she whispered; 'I think it is getting late.'

'Not yet, Marjorie!' said Derrick, with peculiar earnestness; 'I expect our respective great - great - great - grandmothers quarrelled horribly, and wouldn't bow and all that when they met in the road!'

'I make no doubt, sir, that there was something o' the kind.'

'Then you and I have got to make it up, and heal old sores, haven't we?'

'Heal old sores? Oh, sir! I should be glad! I sorely misdoubt what my feyther 'ull say to this night's careless wagging o' my tongue!'

‘Nonsense! I’ll make it right with your father. He’ll be pleased, and so will your mother.’

‘And John, sir?’ said Marjorie anxiously and entreatingly.


‘John? Who’s John? Yes; I’ve no doubt that “John” will be delighted also.’

‘John is my brother, sir.’

‘Is he?’ said Derrick, with the faintest abatement of the radiance of his face. ‘Well! so much the better! The more the merrier! Cousin John will be delighted also.’

‘Oh, sir, I am so glad!’ cried Marjorie, her face suffused with grateful emotion.

‘Are you glad? But you must not look so much in earnest. Not when your face is so close to me. You make me so horribly in earnest also,’ said Derrick, looking at her with whimsical gravity. ‘Now listen to me. I do feel a kind of intolerable solemnity creeping over me! a sense of fate working unseen, of joy that is only witchery and will vanish while I look at it; a sort of forlorn notion that if I did not hold you fast by the hand, you



might vanish into thin air, and leave me tumbling for ever headlong over a precipice—or something of that kind.'

'Oh, don't speak like that and look so sad!'

In truth, there was something in Derrick's face that justified the entreaty. It was a moment of unlooked-for joy, and he knew nothing of grief; and yet in this instant, when the fair gates of desire seemed thrown wide open, and the hand of fate beckoned him to enter, he gazed into the eyes of the woman he loved with an indescribable tremulous shadow upon his countenance.

'Am I sad, Marjorie?' asked he in a low voice; 'and are your eyes full of tears?'

'Yes. But they have only come because you speak so strangely.'

He made no response, but stood looking thoughtfully upon the ground. Then he came near, and laid his hand lightly upon her shoulder.

'We should make ourselves strong against fate,' said he. 'Two warm hearts can vanquish

evil. But this is a great good. We have been coming to meet each other through all that vista of years—through the lapse of a century and a half.'

'I do not understand you, sir. It would indeed be a solemn meeting if that could be the case.'

'Place your right hand in mine.'

He spoke with a certain air of authority, and she involuntarily obeyed.

'Are you being thoroughly attentive, Marjorie? Are not your eyes wandering?'

'Not now.'

'No; that is right. We are going to swear to be true to each other.'

'Oh! I am afraid of oaths. We can be good true friends without that.'

'Yes; we can and we will. But there is a cold foolish fear in my heart that makes me want to say something irrevocable.'

'Is it me or yosel yo're afraid of, sir?'

'Neither of us. It is fate.'

'Well, words can't alter that.'

'Oh yes; they can, and shall. We will

make ourselves partners against fate. You must repeat after me these words. No ! I will begin, and then you must follow.'

' Oh ! I am frightened, Maister Derrick.'

' No, no, Marjorie ! You should fear nothing when your cousin is near.'

' But what are we going to say ?'

' Only that we will be true cousins to each other, and forget and forgive the injuries of the past.'

' Gladly, gladly ! Yes, I am ready now, Maister Derrick.'

' Cousin Derrick.'

' Cousin Derrick, then. Who is to swear first ?'

Derrick rapidly composed a vow which, in this moment of excited hope and half-superstitious fear, he well-nigh regarded as an adequate charm against a threatening fate. Marjorie, startled and perplexed at his manner, held his hand and, following his words, took the promise mechanically; and then he loosed her hand, clasped it again, and repeated the oath himself.

‘Don’t you think we’ve appeased all the revengeful shades now?’ said he when it was over.

‘Oh yes. There is no doubt of that.’

‘Is the Gallery getting cold, that you shiver?’

‘It is you that are shivering, Maister Derrick. Perhaps we both are a bit over-excited. Let us go away now.’

‘Well, out of the Gallery, but not away from each other. When you go, I shall take you back to your parents.’


They walked together through the long suites of rooms and passages. On the way they encountered one or two servants; Derrick, flushed and excited, held his head high, but Marjorie’s drooped thoughtfully. He took her to the library, and rang for her shawl and hat to be brought, and would not hear of the housekeeper’s room. Then he accompanied her home.

It was not strange that once more out in the quiet starlight, a feeling of restraint, which had entirely left them in the Gallery,

crept over them again ; the sense that something grave and important had happened solemnized them and kept them silent. They spoke very little ; and when they reached the gate that led into the meadow, Marjorie came to a standstill.

‘I am going in with you. I wish to see your father.’

‘Not to night, Maister Derrick. Look yo ! I’ve a feeling that to-night is na the best time. We’re both strung up like ; we’ve both got worked upon by I know not what. Tomorrow we shall think o’ things i’ a sensible fashion. Listen to me. My feyther ’ud no more dream o’ changing hissel because o’ Eleanor Marjorie Devonporte, than you would because o’ owd Martin Morrison. Do yo understand ? We *may* be cousins i’ a sort o’ way, but at the end on’t, my feyther’s Farmer Morrison still, and yo are the Squire. I know that’s how my feyther looks at it, and I know he bears no manner o’ grudge ; and now he knows yo’ve acknowledged us, he winna be so proud like about going near th’ Hall and




that. And when John hears, he'll surely bear yo no grudge neither—nay! I canna think he will! But that is all the difference.'

'Bear no grudge? Why should he? But you are going to take yourself away from me again!'

'After my promise? No, sir, indeed. But it's just the *real* as is coming over me, and making itsel heard. I see them all i' my mind sitting i' the kitchen at home—look now at the light i' the window—and I know so well the way i' which feyther 'ull take the news—quiet like and undisturbed, for we have us pride in us own way too, sir. And yo and me—for all that happened i' the Gallery—canna cut oursels off from the rest, and just be cousins to oursels. It mun be back-door and housekeeper's room if iver I come again, Maister Derrick—I know my feyther 'ud say so. Remember all o' them are your cousins if I am.'

'Yes; all are my cousins,' said Derrick rather wearily.



‘ Good-night, sir.’

‘ Marjorie ! Marjorie ! call me cousin
again.’

‘ Cousin Derrick, good-night.’

END OF VOL. I.



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